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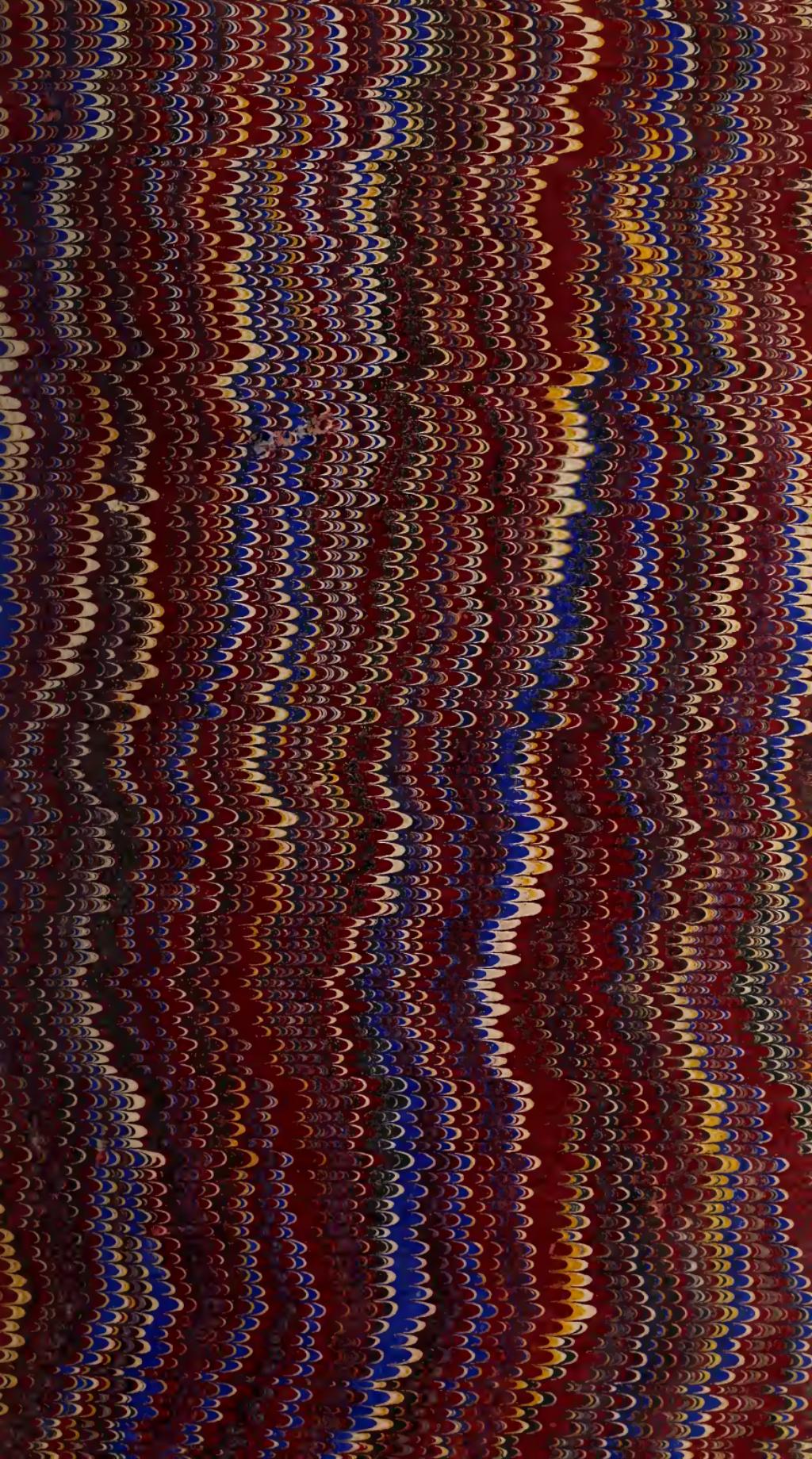
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.







from his affectionate son S. P. T.

A

STATEMENT

OF

PROCEEDINGS IN THE FIRST SOCIETY IN COVENTRY,

CONNECTICUT,

Which terminated

IN THE REMOVAL OF THE PASTOR.

WITH AN

ADDRESS

TO HIS LATE PEOPLE.

—
BY ABIEL ABBOT,
Late Pastor of the First Church in Coventry
—

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage.”

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STATEMENT, &c.

THE unhappy controversy which has existed for many months in the first ecclesiastical society in Coventry, Connecticut, having at length terminated in the removal of the pastor, the reasons and the manner of it may be a subject of interesting inquiry among many who have not the means of correct information.

As I would now gladly find that repose which is congenial with my temper, principles and habits, and escape from the painful scenes which have embittered the close of my ministry, it is not without reluctance that I have yielded to the importunity of friends, and to the request and reasonable expectation of many persons at a distance, to give a plain, unvarnished statement of facts, and such remarks as may set the whole controversy in a just point of light. The task which I undertake is delicate; but I shall not needlessly wound any man's feelings. I will bring no railing accusation. The men from whom I have differed, I have loved; the men from whom I have suffered, I have respected; and to none am I conscious to this hour of feeling an unfriendly sentiment. From the heart I wish them grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In February, 1795, I began to preach as a candidate to the first ecclesiastical society in Coventry; and in October following, with unanimity in the church and society, was ordained to the pastoral office. Except by a very few of the church,

very little dissatisfaction with my opinions was manifested to me before February, 1810, when most of the brethren met at my house to inquire and to converse concerning my opinions. Two of them having stated their sense of the importance of their own opinion concerning Christ and justification, desired me to express my views, with a summary of my reasons for them. On the first point my opinion was stated to this effect, That the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only true God, and that Jesus Christ, being the Son of God, has derived all from him. To the inquiry, What is the ground of the sinner's justification before God? My reply was, The mercy of God. After some conversation I observed, that I perceived there was a difference of opinion between me and some, if not all of the church; and perhaps of the society also, and on points in *their view* fundamental. That if this were fact, I could not probably be a very edifying or useful preacher to them; and was therefore willing, if it was the desire of the church and society, whatever domestick inconvenience it might be to me, that my pastoral relation should be dissolved. It was replied, that they wished nothing done rashly, and that except what arose from this difference of opinion, they had no desire that the connexion should be dissolved.

After this interview, the members of the church, without requesting the attendance of the pastor, held frequent meetings; and in June following most of them met at my house for further inquiry and conversation in regard to my opinions. The result of this interview however was not satisfactory.

At this meeting, they requested me to *preach* on the subjects about which we differed. I complied with their request in several discourses; stating my opinions, not in a controversial manner, and without impugning, in any material respect, the opinions of the aggrieved brethren.

In September I received a written request "to warn a church meeting, to consider and resolve on proper measures to be adopted and pursued under our present difficulties." On the 13th the church met. After opening the meeting with prayer, I made some observations with a view to conciliate the minds of the brethren, and to convince them that the

points concerning which we had different opinions, were not fundamental.

The church notwithstanding voted their belief of several articles acknowledged by them to be *incomprehensible*, and yet not expressed in scripture language. To my mind this appears nothing short of a bold attempt to explain incomprehensibility; and even further, to palm on conscience a human gloss for divine truth. However, they immediately proceeded to vote to this effect, That as their pastor neither preached nor believed these incomprehensible doctrines thus explained in their own terms, it is expedient to apply to the Association of ministers in the county of Tolland for advice.

October 2d. the church was advised by the Association to take proper measures for convening the council of *the consociated churches in the county of Tolland*. Being present at the time, I observed to the Association, that, in my apprehension, there was no Consociation in the county; and if there were, that I did not consider myself amenable to it. But that I was willing to unite with the church in submitting our difficulties to a mutual council. The committee of the church who were present, said they were not authorized by the church to agree upon such council, and that they thought the ministers and churches in the county a more suitable board, to consider and decide the difficulties.

At a church meeting on the 9th. of October, I stated to the church reasons for my settled opinion, that there was no Consociation in the county, to take cognizance of our difficulties. This brief reply was made to my statement by a member, that a plea against jurisdiction was not to be made to the church; and the church then voted compliance with the advice of the Association.

At the request of the church, the society met on the 15th. of November, and declined calling the Consociation; proposed a mutual council, and passed other votes relating to existing difficulties. In consequence of the proposal of the society to convene a mutual council, the church met November 21st. and voted to unite with the pastor and society in convening a mutual council, "*provided we shall be able to agree with him and the society on the churches from which such council shall be called.*"

On the 27th. of November, there was a convention of the committees of the church and society with the pastor. The committee of the society, in order to promote the desired accommodation, after some conversation, waved their right of selecting any members of the council. The committee of the church and myself then attempted to agree on the churches from which the council should be called. And on the 30th. we met again for the same purpose, but a *majority of the committee* of the church then *refused a mutual council*. The majority of the church, being still anxious for a mutual council, after several meetings by themselves, a committee inquired, Whether it would be agreeable to me to unite with the church and society in a mutual council to *dissolve my pastoral relation*? To this inquiry I replied, That I had always been, and still was ready to join in calling such council, when the church and the society should desire it, and that should such council be called, the reasons of my dismission, and all existing difficulties, must be laid before them.

February 20th. the church voted to unite with their pastor in calling a mutual council to *dissolve the pastoral relation* subsisting between him and them. The society dissented from this proposal, refusing to join in calling a council thus *restricted*, and *bound to dissolve* the connexion. Disappointed in this attempt, the church committee then proposed to join with me in calling a mutual council to dismiss me, *without the society's consent*. To me this appeared not only improper in itself, but unsafe, as it would be against the express vote of the society ; and as such council would be incompetent to annul the contract between me and them.

Thus failing of the countenance of the society both to the calling of Consociation, and to the calling of a council restricted to dissolve my pastoral relation, the church at length determined to take upon itself the responsibility of the only measure, which would put the case in a train perfectly agreeable to the will of those who had taken a principal part in these measures. Accordingly I was duly notified of a complaint of the church, and of the time for convening "the council of the consociated churches in the county of Tolland."

"The Consociation of Tolland county," *so called*, convened April 16th. Called to answer to the complaint of the church,

I read and presented the following PROTEST against the jurisdiction of the Consociation.

TO THE REVEREND ELDERS AND MESSENGERS OF THE CHURCHES IN THE COUNTY OF TOLLAND, CONVENED IN THE FIRST SOCIETY IN COVENTRY.

Fathers and Brethren,

HAVING been notified of the assembling of this body of christians, purporting to be *the council of the consociated churches in the county of Tolland*, to take cognizance of the concerns of the first church and society in Coventry, and of their pastor, I declare my sincere persuasion, that I am not amenable to them; and therefore, in the presence of God, I solemnly protest against the authority of this council to sit in judgment upon the complaint of this church.

Entertaining a high respect for many members of this body, whose friendship and esteem for a course of years I was happy to cultivate and enjoy; cherishing for the church under my care, a tenderness and solicitude, which none but pastors can know, and for the society an affection, I hope, answerable to their recent generosity for my support, and immoveable attachment to my person and ministry in a season of distressing trial; and feeling duly anxious to support my christian and ministerial character against the shock of this occasion; while I deny their authority, I regard it due to this council, due to my beloved church and people, due to myself, and due to the rights of conscience, and the cause of truth, that I make a full disclosure of the grounds on which I rest my protest.

In the government of the New England churches from the first settlement of this country by our pious ancestors, in cases of difficulty, the offer of a mutual council has been generally regarded as a fundamental principle. Therefore I deny the authority of this council, and protest against it.

I. Because there has not been made to me the offer of an impartial council, mutually chosen by the church and me, to consider and decide the difficulties subsisting between us.

In difficulties arising between a pastor and his people, the offer of a mutual council, in the first instance left free to result according to facts and evidence, is not only agreeable to

the practice of the churches, but is essential to equity; for when a minister of the gospel is settled for an indefinite term of time, as I was, he has an office for life, determinable on misbehaviour. In every point of view it is most essential, that a charge of misbehaviour be heard and resulted upon in the most impartial manner, and in a way in which all parties concerned have entire confidence. This cannot be, if those who form the result be not mutually chosen, and left free to decide between the parties.

It is therefore, I conceive, a first principle, that no exparte council, in a case like the present, can be had, before such a mutual council has been fairly offered, and *unreasonably refused*. And what is thus essential to equity, I understand to have been almost invariably the settled opinion and practice of the New England churches. Thus it has been in Massachusetts at all times; and so in Connecticut till 1708; and very generally so since that time. Such a council has always been offered in the first instance in all the churches that have not been consociated, and frequently in those that have.

Will it be affirmed that such council has been offered to me? Let a statement of facts decide.

On the 13th. of September last, the church voted to apply to the Association for advice. On the 2nd. of October, the Association advised them; "the previous steps being taken, to take measures to convene the council of *the consociated churches in the county of Tolland*." On the 9th. of said month, the church voted, that previous steps had been taken; and without conference with their pastor, or desiring his concurrence, decided to convene said council. From these facts it is sufficiently obvious, that the church designed to avoid a mutual council.

The refusal of the society to concur with the church in calling the Consociation, arrested the measure for a season. The society, however, did not disregard the wishes of the church, but as a step to conciliate them, and as a measure equitable to all parties, proposed to join with them in calling a mutual council to consider and decide the matters of difficulty. To this proposal the church apparently acceded, and a committee was appointed to confer with the pastor and the committee of the society, and to appoint the council. They met; but (I

speak of a majority of the committee) not to offer me a mutual council. Indeed it must not be disguised, they were still determined, that no council should sit, in the convention of which their pastor should have voice or influence.

After two months delay, the church proposed a mutual council to *dissolve the connexion* between the pastor and the church and people. This council, proposed by the church, I fully understood to be for the sole purpose of *dissolving* the connexion; so much so, that should the council have been perfectly satisfied that to continue it would be useful and happy, it could not have resulted to that effect. The society, unwilling that a council should be called to sit without consultation, and to act as it should be dictated to them, declined this proposal. And the next measure of the church was to convene the present body.

From this statement of facts is it not demonstrated, that in no one of the proposals of the church has a council, to be mutually chosen and authorized to judge between the parties, been offered to me? And as in the greatest part of New England no other council is competent to act, either in the eye of the civil law, or according to the usage of the churches, before the offer of a fair, impartial, mutual council has been made and refused, I protest against the authority of this body to judge in my case, as I have neither had a voice, nor even been consulted in their convocation.

Will it be said, that this body is not convened as an *ex parte* council, but under the Saybrook platform, sanctioned by the legislature of the state?

II. The second ground of my protest against the authority of this body is the *platform itself*, and facts relative to it.

It is readily acknowledged, as an historical fact, that in 1708 the legislature of the state required of the elders and messengers of the churches "to draw a form of ecclesiastical discipline, and to present the same to be considered of and confirmed by them." The Saybrook agreement was the instrument; and the legislature approved it. And is this then the law ecclesiastical of the state? It is replied; not by virtue of the recommendation of the Saybrook council; and not by virtue of the approving act of the assembly. Neither of these alone,

nor both conjoined, were competent to so great an effect. It became the ecclesiastical law of the state so far as elders and churches adopted it, and no farther. Neither the council nor the legislature affected to extend the instrument to a single church or elder without express consent.

It may be said, that the four counties of which the state was then composed adopted the constitution. This is speaking in round numbers. The question seems to be, Did all the churches in the several counties adopt it? If not, so many as declined to consociate were not under the authority of Consociation. And again; Did as many as consociated abide by this ecclesiastical constitution? If not, so many as withdrew themselves are not subject to its authority. These are points which, I conceive, will not be contested.

Now the ecclesiastical body, convened on this occasion, claims to be considered the Consociation of Tolland county. However it may be with the platform in other counties, I hope to make it appear, that it has no authority in Tolland; at least, none over the first church in Coventry; certainly none over its elder.

Here it is very material to inquire the *object* for which the platform requires a Consociation to be formed; whether it be *general*, that is, with a view to act or judge in all cases which may occur, or *special*, that is, with a view to act or judge in a case already existing. Clearly this distinction is not merely *formal*; it is most *essential*, and results from first principles. For if a Consociation be originally formed to try a particular case between two known parties at the instance of one of them, and against the remonstrance of the other, it can in no respect differ from an *ex parte* council; and cannot be supposed to deliberate and result impartially. Beyond all doubt, therefore, a Consociation is to be originally formed for a *general* purpose. But let the instrument speak for itself.

By article II. of the Saybrook agreement, it is provided, that the churches in each county shall "consociate for mutual affording to each other such assistance, as may be requisite, upon all occasions ecclesiastical." Here is *authority* for a Consociation in the county of Tolland, and its general object is defined. But the churches in the county of Tolland are not a

Consociation before an act, an *original act* of their own, renders them such.

The *method* of forming a Consociation is stated in article X.* The minister or ministers of the county town must appoint time and place, and the elders in person, and the churches by messengers, must attend, *if they see cause to send them*.

Thus convoked and convened they become a Consociation; which can adjourn, and can meet again within the year, if occasion require; and by *annual election* can perpetuate itself.

I ask, if this original act, this *convention*, I may say, to *adopt the constitution*, has ever taken place? Who convoked the churches in this county? and what churches attended and submitted themselves to this strong instrument of ecclesiastical government?

The elders and messengers have never met according to article X. of said agreement; nor according to any other method believed to be regular. There is no record of a Consociation in the county, or of one consociational act. If it be said, they were formed at Willington more than twenty years ago, it is replied, that, as they had not been regularly formed a Consociation before that occasion, they could not be formed then, because, as before proved, this would have been in direct violation of first principles. But if it be granted, in violence to first principles, that it was formed at that time, it cannot have continued; for this body may not adjourn for a longer time than one year.

Therefore, because there has been no original convention according to the Saybrook agreement, or any other believed to be regular; because there is no record of Consociation; and no memory of any regular act of such body; by the platform itself there can be now no authorized Consociation in the county of Tolland.

Perhaps it will be contended that these churches were once consociated in the counties from which Tolland was composed, and that the legislative act which formed a district or circuit, within which, according to the platform, there might be a Consociation, created such body.

That they ever were consociated, at least all of them, admits of question. If they were consociated in their native

* See Appendix II.

counties it is contended, that the civil act which formed a district or circuit did not create a Consociation in it. If the creating of a county is of course the creating of such an ecclesiastical body, the church is subjected to the ordinances of the civil government to an extent that has never been contemplated; and every alteration of a county, and every new county, may essentially affect the relations of the churches; and divide or unite them according to the will of the legislature. The ministers of this county seemed fully satisfied on that occasion, that their *associational* relation was not affected by the ordinance creating the county; for they continued several years in their former *Associations*, and when a new Association was formed it appears from their records it was formed by a *convention* of ministers for the purpose. After all, whatever be the standing of other churches in the county in regard to Consociation, I humbly conceive the first church in Coventry is not subject to its jurisdiction, nor, if now they desire it, entitled to its interference. I have carefully inspected the records of the church, and inquired of living members; and not a vestige appears in book or memory of any election of members to the original convention, or to any regular subsequent council.

Will it be said that this church, being in the county, is subject to the jurisdiction of Consociation whether it has ever made an election of its authority or not?

But does the platform authorize or enable some churches, say a major part in the county, to form a Consociation, and thereby to draw within its controul and discipline, and to judge other churches in the county declining to consociate? Clearly there are *no express* provisions in it to this purpose. And surely it will not be urged in our country, that some are to judge others by *implication* or *intendment* against their consent, or the consent of either party to be tried, unless it has unreasonably rejected a mutual council. In a civil state this would be despotism; and can the sacred name of religion alter its nature? Indeed the platform, strong and decisive as its powers are, disclaims this power. It provides liberty to come into the Consociation, and liberty to remain out of it. It provides that after convocation, the elders in their persons, and the churches by their messengers, *if they see cause to send*

them, shall meet in convention and consociate. Thus it is submitted to the unbiassed election of every church to send, or refuse to send. And the legislature, duly solicitous to guard the voluntary independence of the churches, concludes the very act approving the platform in these memorable words, "Provided always, that nothing herein shall be intended or construed to hinder or prevent any society or church, that is, or shall be allowed by the laws of this government, who soberly differ or dissent from the united churches, hereby established, from exercising worship and discipline in their own way according to their consciences."

I think it has been shown that the church is not consociated, and I now add, that it cannot surely admit of a moment's doubt, that the pastor is independent of its jurisdiction. For elders no more than churches are subjected to it without their consent. This appears I conceive from the platform; and my construction is justified by a vote of the *general Association*, and by the uniform practice in the consociated districts, the candidates being called upon before ordination to consent to that method of church government. But so far from consenting I had not the slightest suspicion of its authority in this church; nor had the church itself. For they proceeded by platform, neither in inviting me to this place, nor in calling me to the pastoral office, nor in convoking a council for my ordination. My ordination was not by a council of consociated churches; nor was I called to give my consent to the confession of faith or the articles of discipline contained in Saybrook platform. During the fifteen years of my ministry the church has never given me the least intimation, that it was consociated, or deemed itself or its minister amenable to the platform before the vote in October last to *convene* a council of the consociated churches. During all this time I have neither consented to the platform, nor met in Consociation, nor done a single act which expressed or implied any connexion with any consociated churches. Nor has the conduct of this church been singular. The other churches in the county have practised in the same manner. Since the erection of the county there have been more than twenty councils, most for ordination, several for scandal, and some for dismission of el-

ders, and *all* upon independent principles, except the single irregular council at Willington.

Under these circumstances, and on these grounds, I am constrained, with great deference to my brethren and fathers, and without any defect of christian esteem and good will, to protest against the jurisdiction of this body, and to deny that I am amenable to them, because there is not, there cannot be a regular Consociation in this county at this time; because, if this body could answer to this character I am not amenable to it, having never consented to its constitution or authority; because, if the church could, without my concurrence, join themselves to such a body, they cannot implicate me in their engagement; and because, if in future I could be bound by their act in this respect, it would be utterly unreasonable and oppressive that it should be retrospective, and that a new tribunal should be instituted for the adjustment of our differences, at least, so long as the methods upon which they and the churches here assembled have heretofore proceeded, remain untried.

Hitherto I have been confined chiefly to a consideration of human authority, as expressed in articles of agreement and usage among the churches, which are binding so far as they agree with the word of God, and are consented to by elders and churches. The complaint of the church is concerning *opinions* which I am supposed to entertain. This is a charge of a nature to be tried by a higher court. Therefore

III. The third ground of my protest is, that councils have no authority in matters of faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ claims to be the prophet and the sole authoritative head of the church; his disciples are brethren. Even to his inspired apostles, he gave no authority of themselves to prescribe new articles of faith. They assumed no lordship over God's heritage. Since thus as brethren we stand upon the line of equality, I would ask to which of us the master has given commission to dictate to the rest? Whom has he constituted infallible interpreters of the scriptures? Whom has he constituted keepers and directors of the understanding and faith of the rest? If any, doubtless they will be able to show their commission attested by the broad seal of miracles. None pretend to miracles; therefore none may

pretend to infallibility. If then a fallible body of christians assume to dictate to others, what forbids these in return to dictate to them? Their authority is equal, and with equal censures they can enforce their dogmas. What confusion and schism in the churches must be the inevitable consequence? *Must* be, do I say? *has been*; and this ever since the council of Nice.

In support of these positions are those words of the candid and learned Dr. Lardner, "No man or number of men separated or united in council, since the time of Christ and his apostles have any right to decide in matters of faith? It is inconsistent with the respect due to Jesus Christ to attempt it; unless they can show themselves to be inspired, and work miracles to manifest evidently a divine commission. This is agreeable to many things said by our Lord, especially in the 23d. of Matthew, "And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your father which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your master even Christ."

"If you can bring reason or scripture for any doctrine, men will assent; but to say the bishops of such a council have so declared and determined is not convincing: Therefore, it ought not to be expected that men should confess and act as if they were convinced.

"The Council of Nice introduced authority and force in the church, and in the affairs of religion.

"This way of acting may be supposed to have been the chief cause of the ruin of the christian interest in the East.

"In about 300 years after the ascension of Jesus, without the aids of secular power or authority, the christian religion spread over a large part of Asia, Europe, and Africa; and at the accession of Constantine, and convening the council of Nice, it was almost every where throughout those countries in a flourishing condition. In the space of another 300 years, or a little more, the beauty of the christian religion was corrupted in a large part of that extent, its glory defaced, and its light almost extinguished. What can this be so much owing to, as to the determinations and transactions of the council of Nice, and the measures then set on foot, and followed in succeeding times."

And it may be remarked, that no party has ever been convinced of its errors merely by the decisions of councils. Sometimes the church has acquiesced, not through any conviction of the authority or correctness of the council, but commonly through the power of the secular arm.

“The futility of recurring to this method for terminating disputes,” says one of the most eminent Scotch divines, “is what the whole christian world, Greek and Latin, Protestant and Papist, seems now to be sufficiently convinced of ; inasmuch, that without the spirit of prophecy one may venture to foretel, unless there is a second dotation which the church has yet to undergo, the council of Trent will remain the last, under the name of ecumenical, assembled for the purpose of ascertaining articles of faith.”

Such are the opinions of those great and good men. But there is authority for this third ground of protest which this body will not call in question. I have only to read from the Saybrook platform, page 2d. “It was the glory of our fathers, that they heartily professed the *only rule* of their religion from the very first to be the *holy scripture*.” This rule of faith I esteem sufficient, this I receive most sincerely and hold most sacredly with our pious fathers.”

Page 6 of the Platform we read, “We do not assume that any thing be taken upon trust from us, but commend to our people these following counsels,

I. *That you be immovably and unchangeably agreed in the only sufficient and invariable rule of religion, which is the holy scripture, the fixed canon, incapable of addition or diminution.* You ought to account nothing ancient that will not stand by this rule, nor any thing new that will.

II. *That you be determined by this rule in the whole of religion. That your faith be right and divine, the word of God must be the foundation of it, and the authority of the word the reason of it.*”

In Page 17th. and article 10th. of the confession, we are taught who are to determine opinions and doctrines : “*The supreme Judge by which all controversies are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be none other, but the holy*

scripture delivered by the Spirit; into which scripture so delivered our faith is finally resolved.

So important did the Saybrook fathers regard this 10th. article of their confession, that they took care to have it printed with a different type; by which, though dead, they still speak against human authority in matters of faith. They do not set up the confession in the platform, as a rule by which the sense of scripture is to be determined; for this would be to declare the scriptures the *only rule*, and then gravely proceed to set up another. This was not their inconsistent meaning. So far from this, that we find one of the articles of their belief, that "the infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of scripture (which is not manifold but one) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

Is a man, then, you inquire, not responsible to men for the faith which in his conscience he entertains?

Let the platform resolve the question. Page 65, "God alone is Lord of conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to his word, or not contained in it, so that to believe such doctrines or to obey such commands *out of* conscience is to betray true liberty of conscience, and the requiring of an implicit faith and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also."

This and more have the Saybrook fathers left in their instrument to guard the sacred right of conscience, and private judgment. In doing this, they have evinced their knowledge of the doctrine of the reformation, and their correctness upon protestant ground. When, in the year 1529, by the instigation of the pope, a decree was made by the imperial diet at Spire, that ministers should preach according to the sense and interpretation of scripture *approved by the church*, a counter protest was entered by six princes and thirteen cities, that no doctrine was so certain, as that of God's word, and nothing should be taught besides it. This was the only sure and infallible way; but the traditions of men had no certain foundation.

"From this famous protest, the honourable name of protestant was derived, as professing a strict adherence to scripture truth and authority, with the right of private judgment and interpretation, in opposition to all ecclesiastical injunctions and decisions." Here commenced the Protestant religion in distinction from the Papal; the Roman church said, "Submit yourselves to authority without examination: The Protestant church says, "Examine the scriptures, and submit to conviction."

More than a century after this event, glorious to the church, the assembly of divines at Westminster followed the example of protestant Germans. For we learn from one of the members of that assembly,* when the Scots commissioners proposed, that the answers in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism should be subscribed by all the members of the assembly, intending very probably to make them a standard of orthodoxy, the assembly rejected the motion of the commissioners after a considerable number in the assembly had shown it was an unwarrantable imposition upon christians." Thus evident it is without further fact or remark, what is protestant ground, and what the doctrine of the reformation; and that our pious ancestors in forming the platform of Cambridge in 1648, and of Saybrook in 1708, perfectly understood and maintained the same ground.

Since our Lord Jesus Christ claims to be the head of the church; since no man or body of men uninspired can lay claim to infallibility; since the pious founders of the platform have left their solemn caution against any authoritative interpretations of scripture, and fully assert the right of conscience and private judgment; and since this principle of the platform is the great doctrine of protestantism and the reformation, I feel constrained to protest against the authority of this body to sit in judgment upon this complaint concerning opinions.

My honoured fathers and beloved brethren, I have now stated the three great grounds of my protest against the authority of this council. In conclusion, suffer me to state them together.

* Mr. Nye. See Ward's *Dis. and Conscientious Non Conform.*

Upon principles of equity and the general practice in the churches in New England, I regard myself entitled to an impartial council, mutually chosen by the church and me, to consider and decide the difficulties between us. This has never been offered to me.

There has never been a convention of elders and messengers in this county to adopt this ecclesiastical constitution. There never has been but one council in the county assuming the name of consociated, and *that* most certainly irregular. This church has no record or memory of any connection with Consociation. The pastor has never consented to these articles of agreement. The platform claims to bind neither church nor elder without consent.

The complaint of this church is entirely concerning opinions, and these stated, not in words which the *Holy Ghost* teacheth, but which *man's* wisdom teacheth. For men to determine such a complaint I conceive would be to assume the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ. The platform does not permit it; and if it did it is not warranted by the leading principle of protestantism and the reformation; and I firmly believe such authority is conceded by the word of God to no man or body of men upon earth.

My christian friends, I will detain you but a moment. I look upon this council with much concern; the question before them is of no ordinary nature or importance.

The *temporal* inconveniences resulting from your proceeding may be very serious. Should the act of the council in any way affect the relation of the pastor to this church and people it will be liable to be reviewed by a court of law, where cause and evidence will be weighed in an even balance. The trouble, expense and irritation attendant on legal contest you can estimate. But these are the less evils. The greater concern the cause of our dear and divine master. Here I will not dissemble my anxiety; silence would be sin. All the danger lies not on the side of error; the evils of schism, of contention among christian brethren, of the members separated from the head, and of the head from the members, are of most melancholy aspect. Should the council be necessary to the existence or aggravation of these evils, and upon grounds not acknowledged by the word of God, will they be able to answer it to our common master? My brethren, our office is arduous, because of the opposition we meet with from men of *corrupt*

minds ; and must the labour and perplexity be accumulated by mutual opposition among ministers and christians ? While the servant of Christ in the integrity of his heart, with his eye night and day upon his commission and his work, is labouring for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, *over whom the Holy Ghost has made him an overseer*, shall he be embarrassed and arrested by his fellow labourers in the vine-gard ? Is it not more consonant to the spirit of Christ, by which they ought all to be animated, to *forbear one another in love*, even more, *to lift up the hands which hang down, and to strengthen the feeble knees* ? A minister's character is his means, under God, of doing good ; it is therefore sacred : it must not be assailed without necessity and warrant the most clear. Of an accepted servant Christ declares, *He that despiseth you, despiseth me ; he that rejecteth you, rejecteth me*. A stroke at the shepherd reacheth the whole flock ; *the shepherd smitten, the flock is scattered*. Looking back then on the origin of our difficulties, let me ask, with what caution should christians in the bosom of the church admit an accusation against an elder ; with what tenderness cherish his reputation ; and with what circumspection avoid offences, lest prejudices be awakened, many hearts be closed against his ministrations, and the ingrafted word cease to be received with meekness, and the souls of a people to grow thereby. I know these fathers and brethren too well, I think, to suppose they will forget their responsibility to the Great Head of the church, or be unmindful of the peace and prosperity in this place, or regardless of the temporal evils, and I must solemnly add, the eternal evils, which may result from their acting irregularly, or with doubtful jurisdiction.

Brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

COVENTRY, APRIL 16th. 1811.

ABIEL ABBOT.

The society having been together in full meeting on the day previous to the convention of the council, and instructed their committee to protest against the proceeding of that body in any manner to affect the relations of their pastor, the committee by their advocate read and presented the following instrument.

TO THE REV. ELDERS AND MESSENGERS OF THE CHURCHES
IN TOLLAND COUNTY, CONVENED IN THE FIRST SOCIETY
IN COVENTRY.

Gentlemen,

THE first ecclesiastical society in Coventry by their committee offer this protest and memorial to prevent, if possible, this body of christians from interfering at all in the concerns of this society, and from proceeding in any manner whatever against their pastor.

We have never supposed, that the first ecclesiastical society and church in Coventry were at all connected by Consociation with the churches in Tolland county. We have never been able to learn that there ever was a Consociation regularly formed in said county; nor have we ever been able to find, that the business proper to be done by a council has been performed by the circuit, which ought, according to Saybrook platform, to have been thus done, if Tolland county had been a consociational district.

When the Rev. Mr. Abbot was settled here, more than fifteen years ago, this church and society took not a step in the way of Consociation, either by advice, ordination, or otherwise. Nor has any thing been done by this church and society, or their pastor, from that time to the present, that expressed or implied any connection with churches consociated, before the convoking of this council.

Under these circumstances, we protest against the proceeding of this body, as constituting *the council of the consociated churches in the county of Tolland*. And the society, and, we trust, their pastor, will not feel bound by any result which may be made by such body of christians.

We wish further to state in behalf of said society, that we have lived in much harmony and peace with our pastor, and that he has been attentive and diligent to promote our peace and welfare; that as a man, a christian, and a minister, our connection with him has been highly satisfactory; that he has conducted with such prudence, affection, honesty and fidelity among us, as greatly to endear himself to us, and to our families.

Till of late, this church and society appeared well satisfied with the preaching and publick performances of their minister. And we have reason to believe, that his occasional labours in the vicinity have been acceptable.

His preaching has not been often on disputable or controversial points ; but upon *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*, and well calculated to promote love to God and man, and a holy, virtuous, and sober life.

Within a short time, one or two of the society have expressed their dissatisfaction with some opinions which they suppose the pastor to hold, on which the christian church has always been divided. Whatever may be our pastor's view of these subjects, he has not failed to exhibit candour and forbearance towards those who differ from him, and has never endeavoured to disturb the peace of the society with his speculations.

By great and continued exertions, the minds of some others have been alarmed, and the uneasiness increased. Still, notwithstanding the zeal of the dissatisfied, we are in a good degree a united people, and desirous to enjoy the ministrations of our pastor. There is hardly a society where the same kind and degree of exertions to excite alarm and dissatisfaction would not procure as great a number of votes to dismiss a pastor as here.

While great pains have been taken to excite uneasiness and dissatisfaction with our pastor, with less effect, however, than could have been expected, no improper endeavours have been used on his part to disturb the minds of the people, or attach them to him, none but a steady, prudent, and candid behaviour, and a faithful discharge of duty. Indeed, the candour, patience, prudence, fortitude and good temper, which he has uniformly maintained in his great trials, have excited our admiration, and contributed not a little to endear him unto us. If we were to part with our minister, we see no prospect of our being so well united in another.

The society have expressed a willingness to do every thing that seemed reasonable to ease the minds of those who were dissatisfied, and to compose differences. A mutual council to consider, advise and direct in existing difficulties, has been

offered by the society and by the pastor; but this proposal did not prevail. Our pastor upon being asked, Whether he would unite in calling a mutual council to dissolve his pastoral relation, signified his willingness to call such council, if the church and society desired it. But the society it appeared, by a great majority, did not desire it, and refused to take any such measures.

When the vote was taken on the last proposal, and when the vote was tried for calling the consociated churches in Tolland county, the majority was so great against the measures that we may confidently state, that the society will not consent to be deprived of their minister arbitrarily, or in a way which they deem irregular and unlawful.

The society think it their duty to maintain the great doctrine on which the reformation was built; viz. *The sufficiency of the sacred scriptures for a rule of faith, and the right of private judgment.* As we claim the privilege of examining and judging for ourselves, we deem it reasonable that we should allow the same indulgence to our pastor, and to others. As we consider it unreasonable in us to invade the rights of others, we feel it our duty to defend our own. We think it improper to call any man, or body of men, father or master on the earth, or to submit to councils to impose creeds upon us, as we conclude our master has left this in the hands of none of his followers. From ecclesiastical history we find, that since councils have attempted to settle articles of faith, and have not been contented with the sacred scriptures as sufficient, there have been great divisions, animosities and confusion in the christian church. These troubles and difficulties, we apprehend, will not cease, before christians forbear to assume the rights of others, and require more in order to christian fellowship, than Christ and his apostles required. "Two things," says the pious and famous Mr. Baxter, "have set the church on fire, and been the plagues of it for above one thousand years. 1. Enlarging our creed, and making more fundamentals than God ever made. 2. Composing (and so imposing) our creeds and confessions in our own words and phrases. When men have learned more manners and humility, than to accuse God's language as too general and obscure, (as if they could mend it) and have more

dread of God and compassion on themselves, than to make those to be fundamentals or certainties which God never made so, and when they reduce their confessions, first, to their due extent, and secondly, to scripture phrase, that dissenters may not scruple subscribing, then, I think, and never till then, shall the church have peace about doctrinals. It seems to me no heinous Socinian notion which Chillingworth is blamed for; viz. let all men believe the scripture and that only, and endeavour to believe it in the true sense of it, and promise this, and require no more of others, and they shall find this not only a better, but the only means to suppress heresy and restore unity."

Should a body of christians, assuming to be the council of the consociated churches in Tolland county, interfere in the concerns of this society, and attempt to dissolve our pastoral relation with Mr. Abbot, it would probably subject this society to great expense and trouble, as the doings of such body would be liable to be reviewed in a court of law, and thus create civil contentions and disputes, evils, the very prospect of which we deprecate. This vast expense and trouble may be unavoidable, as we are firmly persuaded this body has no jurisdiction or authority to dissolve our contract with our pastor.

The proceeding of this body to interfere in our affairs, especially to denounce our pastor, and attempt to break his connection with us, will perpetuate divisions in this place, and excite animosities which will long render us very unhappy. We greatly fear and dread the evils and difficulties which would probably arise from such rash and violent measures. Should the result be, that after long altercations among ourselves, and a tedious and expensive suit or suits at law, we should be deprived of our pastor, we do not see the least prospect of our being able to unite in settling another. We fear that the spirit of party would be enraged, and our divisions would be such as to render it impossible to agree in any candidate who might come among us; and unless we were well united, we should be unable to furnish a sufficient support to settle a person whom we should choose for our minister. If we were in some degree united, the society would be greatly discouraged from attempting a settlement. We should

fear as soon as we were happily settled, one or two might become dissatisfied, and by their unwearyed pains produce a separation, as in the present case.

But if our present minister be removed from us, in whom we have been, and still are, so happily united ; if his connection here is violently broken up, and, as we believe, arbitrarily and illegally, we can hardly extend our view to the distant prospect of settling another. We deplore what we fear will be the consequences of such an unhappy separation.

We should be exposed to sharp and tedious contention with all its tremendous evils. This people would be without a religious teacher ; our families without religious publick instruction ; our sabbath and sanctuary without a minister to lead in our devotions ; our respect for the clergy would be diminished ; we fear a growing disregard to divine institutions ; and, in consequence of these evils, we fear the morals of the young would lamentably degenerate ; the sabbath be disregarded ; religion exposed to contempt ; and our destitute and unhappy situation might be perpetuated. These great and lasting evils will be attributed to what we deem the unauthorized interference of this ecclesiastical body.

Under these circumstances and prospects we deem it our indispensable duty to repel all violent proceedings against our pastor, and to retain him whatever may be done without our consent to dissolve the connection. We, therefore, for ourselves and the society which we represent, do solemnly protest against the proceeding of any body of christians in our affairs assuming to be the *council of the consociated churches in the county of Tolland.*

AMASA JONES,
CEPHAS BRIGHAM,
CALVIN MANNING, jun. }
JOSEPH DOW, } Committee
of the
Society.

Coventry, April 16, 1811.

After a free and animated discussion, during several hours, of the main question, Whether this body have jurisdiction as a council of consociated churches ? they voted that they were "duly convened and *authorized* to try the complaint before them."

Being again called to answer to the complaint, I informed the council that I should abide by my protest; and of course was silent as to the complaint.

The council then proceeded to consider the complaint; and the church adduced testimony in support of the charges, which, without impeaching the integrity of any, as it was the natural effect of partial examination, it is but just to myself to say, was in some instances at least incorrect. The evidence undoubtedly would have had a different aspect, if the witnesses had been examined by both parties, improper testimony prevented, or just explanations admitted.

The Reverend advocate for the church then attempted to prove and explain to the audience the doctrines supposed to be contained in the complaint, and to enforce upon the council the testimony adduced in support of the several articles of charge.

During this address the feelings of the society were highly excited, many of whom left the house; and some of the church manifested no small anxiety to resort to some more peaceable expedient to terminate the difficulties, than by urging the council, with at least doubtful jurisdiction, to a result so painful to the great majority of the society. After consultation, the advocate of the pastor, with the consent of the society committee, and at the request of a respectable member of the church, and with the hope that it would be agreeable to a majority of the church, respectfully moved, *That this body should waive a decision of the case before them, and give opportunity to settle the difficulties in a manner agreeable to all parties, by a mutual council.* This measure, the suggestion of which had begun to revive the drooping minds of many, met the most strenuous opposition of a principal member of the church's committee. At the suggestion of several members of the church, I renewed to the church, in the recess of the council, the proposal of a mutual council; but this last conciliatory effort also failed of success; and on the following day the **RESULT OF CONSOCIATION** was published as follows:

At a meeting of the elders and messengers of the church in the county of Tolland, on the 16th. of April, 1811, in the first society in Coventry, called at the request of the church in said society, were present,

PASTORS.

DELEGATES OF THE CHURCHES.

<i>Rev. Nathan Williams, D. D.</i>	<i>Deacon Jabez Kingsbury,</i>
<i>Ebenezer Kellogg,</i>	<i>Oliver King,</i>
<i>Amos Bassett,</i>	<i>Stephen Bingham,</i>
<i>Royal Tyler,</i>	<i>Sylvester Gilbert,</i>
<i>Diodate Brockway,</i>	<i>Sawyer Ellis,</i>
<i>Nathan Gillet,</i>	<i>Joseph Talcott,</i>
<i>Ephraim T. Woodruff,</i>	<i>Samuel Dunton,</i>
<i>Hubbel Loomis,</i>	<i>Jabez Collins,</i>
<i>William L. Strong.</i>	<i>Elijah Talcott,</i>
	<i>Rev. Calvin Ingals,</i>
	<i>Mr. John Hall.</i>

Doct. WILLIAMS was chosen moderator, and Mr. BASSETT scribe.

The Consociation was opened with prayer, by the Moderator.

The church laid before this body a complaint, containing the following articles of charge against their pastor, viz.

That he, the Rev. Abiel Abbot, does neither preach nor believe the doctrine of the sacred Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost in the Godhead.

That he does neither preach, nor believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ ; that he is both God and man united in the person of Mediator.

That he does neither preach nor believe the doctrine of the atonement made for sin by the blood of Christ, and of the justification of sinners by the righteousness of Christ, imputed to them and received by faith in him.

The foregoing doctrines, though clearly revealed in the word of God, as not only true, but fundamental in the gospel system, and essential to be believed in order to salvation, are by him omitted in his preaching ; and doctrines contrary to these, and repugnant to the faith once delivered to the saints by Christ and his apostles, and subversive of the christian's hope, are by him taught and inculcated.

Mr. Abbot having read, then presented to this body an address, denying the jurisdiction of this council, and protesting against their sitting in judgment upon the complaint against him.

The society also by their committee, presented an instrument of the same purport, which was read.

The authority of the Consociation having been denied, the subject was largely argued by the counsel both of Mr. Abbot and of the church.

The council then proceeded to a full deliberation upon the arguments offered. The question was then put by the moderator, Do this council consider themselves duly convened and authorized to try the complaint before them? Voted in the affirmative.

The elders and messengers present feel themselves justified and supported in the foregoing decision, by the articles of church discipline unanimously agreed upon by the elders and all the churches of Connecticut convened at Saybrook, Sept. 9, 1708; the same having been adopted by practice and consent of the churches in this county; and for that, this Consociation is convoked conformably to the 13th article thereof, and agreeably to the usage of the churches in this state; and, as we believe, agreeably to the mind and will of Christ; and, for that, no other method of administering church discipline has been adopted among our churches in cases like the one under consideration; nor can we resort to any other, under the present organization of our churches, where the parties cannot, or will not, mutually submit their difficulties.

The Rev. Mr. Abbot was then called upon to answer to the complaint exhibited against him by the church; but he neglected and refused to make answer to the same.

The council then proceeded to hear the testimony produced by the church in support of the articles of charge. After a full and patient hearing and consideration of the case, the question was put upon each article separately, Is this article proved? Voted it is proved.

The general question was then put, Is the Rev. Abiel Abbot guilty of the facts alleged in the complaint of the church against him? Voted unanimously in the affirmative.

Voted, That the man who neither believes, nor preaches the doctrines specified in the articles of charge, is disqualified for the office of the gospel ministry; for he has essentially renounced the scriptures, has made shipwreck of the faith once delivered to the saints, has denied the Messiah of the

gospel, who is the true God and eternal life, and cannot preach to sinners, according to the real meaning of scripture, Jesus Christ and him crucified, who is the only way of salvation, nor feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.

The council therefore feel themselves required by Jesus Christ, the great God and Saviour, on the peril of being judged unfaithful to him, to his church, and the best interests of the society in this place, to declare, and they hereby declare, that the ministerial relation between the Rev. Abiel Abbot and the first church of Christ in Coventry ought to be, and is dissolved. And they do hereby also revoke the commission given to him by his ordination to preach the gospel and administer the ordinances of the same.

The council add, that after having given full weight to every thing brought before them, it is with pain they have found themselves under the necessity of performing this indispensable duty.

By unanimous order of the Consociation.

Signed, NATHAN WILLIAMS, *Moderator.*

Attest, AMOS BASSETT, *Scribe.*

Upon the publication of the result, the Consociation and the church were informed of the determination of the society and myself to convene a mutual council without unnecessary delay; and the hope expressed that nothing might be done to commit the peace of the society, or which might lead to any legal process, before the session of the council.

The churches from which a mutual council should be called were immediately agreed upon by the committee of the society and me, and letters missive issued.

Fully persuaded that there was no regular Consociation in Tolland county, at the least that I was amenable to no such body, and therefore was unaffected by their decision, at the request of the society committee, I continued to perform the duty of a minister.

Upon the **RESULT**, an instrument of extraordinary and I truly believe unexampled aspect, it is necessary for me to remark; it shall be my object to do it coolly and in the spirit of christian

meekness, while at the same time I cannot withhold some expression of my astonishment.

It states that "The elders and messengers present feel themselves justified and supported in the foregoing decision by the articles of church discipline unanimously agreed upon by the elders and all the churches convened at Saybrook, Sep. 9, 1708."

The platform has no force, and the act of the legislature gives it none, before it has been voluntarily adopted. What justification then or countenance can the elders and messengers convened in Coventry derive from these articles of discipline, which most certainly have never been adopted?

But I am admonished by the result, which continues: "the same having been adopted by practice and consent of the churches in this county."

The sincerity of this declaration I must not question; but it is founded in mistake. *Adopted by consent!* When? Where? Will it be said, at Willington more than twenty years ago? There is no record of the important transaction. Nay more; it is not pretended that the elders and messengers of the churches were at that time convoked in order to *consent* to the articles of discipline, or to form Consociation, or that they consented when convened, or that they ever were either convoked or convened to give their consent. And yet this *primary act* the instrument itself demands as essential to authority on the one hand, and to subjection on the other. The council at Willington was in fact no other than a mutual council, agreed upon by the pastor, church and society, to consist of the elders and churches in the county. Certainly therefore the Saybrook agreement has not been adopted in Tolland by *consent*.

Adopted by practice—I am astonished at the suggestion. What is *practice*? I would say, uniform and uncontradicted usage. The least it can mean is *general* usage. Now what is that uninterrupted and undisputed practice in this county which has amounted to an adoption of the Saybrook agreement? The reply is as before, *The council at Willington*. That solitary council, about which there is nothing in point but the name assumed for it, constitutes *general* usage. Let facts reply to this assumption. During twenty five years

since the incorporation of the county, there have been more than twenty five councils convoked for various purposes, not one of which, always excepting the mutual council at Wellington, has been convened according to the articles of agreement, or asserted the slightest pretension to the name of Consociation.

But, as if the platform were not quite sufficient authority, the elders and messengers seem to lay claim to *higher*; declaring that they believe themselves *convoked agreeably to the mind and will of Christ*.

In this language there seems an imitation of apostolic style, and allusion to a passage in the epistle to the Corinthians. Paul on a certain point gives his own judgment, and adds, *I think also that I have the spirit of God*. By which, according to our version, he seems to insinuate, that he was in some doubt whether he were inspired on that point or not. The council seem somewhat better satisfied on the subject of Consociation, and the prescribed manner of its convocation. We know of no ground of the belief they here express, except direct revelation. Were satisfactory reasons given, that the Consociation was convoked in the present instance agreeable to the mind and will of Christ, whether agreeable to the platform, or any other instrument of human invention, or otherwise, no objection would be made. For in every case relating to opinions, Christ alone is master. But I conceive it has been shown in the protest, that the mind of Christ has been very clearly declared in the gospel as against the authority of councils in matters of faith.

“And, for that no other method of administering church discipline has been adopted among our churches in cases like the one under consideration.”

It has not been made to appear, and I conceive cannot, that the present is a matter of discipline. What rule of the gospel is it alleged I have broken? Is this the offence, that I do not believe the fallible interpretations of men? Christ has commanded me to *search the scriptures; to hear and understand; to judge of myself what is right*; and is it criminal to attempt obedience to him? I am enjoined to *prove all things*; and is that belief which results from impartial, from conscientious examination, guilt? And is it a grievance? in a word,

is it matter of discipline, that a christian brother believes what devout and patient investigation has forced upon his mind as truth? and withholds his assent from terms and phrases to his mind incomprhensible, and which he no where finds in the sacred scriptures.

“Nor can we resort to any other under the present organization of our churches, where the parties cannot, or will not, mutually submit their difficulties.”

Mutual council is the general practice of New England. And when one of the parties unreasonably refuses this equitable method, the *other* is entitled to an *ex parte* council. But this privilege is not due to the party *refusing* a mutual council; for no man may take advantage of his own wrong. How then could the church equitably resort to a council essentially *ex parte*? And how could the council assign the pertinacious refusal of a mutual council on the part of the church, as a just reason for flying to their relief?

The objections to authority of Consociation are insuperable. But granting that this body had all the authority in Tolland which Consociation has in the county of Fairfield, where Saybrook platform is the constitution of the churches, both by consent and undisputed usage, there is a very remarkable fact still behind, which seems to have escaped the notice of the council, viz. there was no *positive* and *specific* charge against the pastor before them.

There was no *positive* charge in the complaint. It is wholly composed of negatives; and are negatives susceptible of direct proof? If it be said, there was a positive charge of teaching doctrines “repugnant to the faith, and subversive of the christian’s hope,” I repel the slander with indignation. But the church never brought this forward as a charge; and when called upon by a judicious member of the council to produce their evidence on this point fully, as to him it appeared to be the only positive charge before the council, the committee of the church very frankly acknowledged, that they *had no evidence to produce*, other than had appeared on the other charges. In other words, this was a point, the direct proof of which they were not inclined to undertake. It is evident that this most offensive and groundless insinuation was intended to bring up the rear of negative charges; and lend a colouring to them, which

might alarm the council, and inconsiderate men that should read or hear the complaint ; an effect, which *negative* charges alone might be incompetent to produce. I forbear further comment on a point, which has more deeply wounded my mind, than any other in this extraordinary complaint.

But if this were allowed to be a charge, and had been in due form numbered as such in company with its negative brethren, it is not *specific*. What would be said to a libeller, that should enter a civil court and accuse his quiet neighbour of being a *dishonest man*, at the same time prudently excusing himself from adducing any proof of special acts of fraud, as the ground of his charge ? Would he not be dismissed with reprimand, unless perhaps he were retained to answer with fine or imprisonment for his general and slanderous libel ? How remote is this from being the parallel of the case on which I am remarking ? The suggestion (for the committee of the church allow me not to call it a charge) is altogether of this general nature, and unsupported by evidence, or one specific fact. Look at the terms of this statement ; “and doctrines contrary to these, repugnant to the faith, and subversive of the christian’s hope, are by him taught and inculcated.” What the doctrines are, which I am here said to teach, no mortal can conjecture from the language of the complaint. When ? and where ? and to whom were they preached ? The church excuse themselves from evidence with respect to these *facts* ; and say only, as I did not preach certain doctrines which they name, therefore I did preach certain other doctrines which they do not name. That is, I did not preach christianity, therefore I did preach Islamism. If positives can be thus proved by negatives, the case of an accused man is indeed desperate ; I know not any thing which they cannot prove against him. By this means they can prove him a Mahometan, a Bramin, or infidel of any description, which may suit their fancy ; and can prove that he preaches in character to his faith.

In this view of this extraordinary *suggestion* is not the reader prepared to expect that the council at once blotted it from the complaint ; and if they did not rebuke the church, at least pass the charge which the committee did not profess to support in forgiving silence ? Let him learn from the fol-

lowing extraordinary vote: "The general question was then put, Is the Rev. Abiel Abbot guilty of the *facts* alleged in the complaint of the church against him? Voted unanimously in the affirmative."

To what *facts* do the council allude? There are none stated in the complaint; which is nothing but a negation of facts. There are none *specified* in the convenient remark, which the church subjoined to their charges. If the language could be tortured into the meaning of a specific charge of *criminal facts*, the committee declined producing any proof. Yet the council here declare the Rev. A. A. guilty of the *facts* alleged against him in the *complaint*. This vote passing unanimously, it is extremely difficult to reconcile with the known good sense and integrity of some of the council.

It ought not to pass without observation, that the complaint of the church, and virtually the result of council, declare the doctrines specified to be "clearly revealed in the word of God, as not only true, but fundamental in the gospel system, and essential to be believed in order to salvation." This is easily said in the complaint, and easily voted in the result. But it is a difficult matter to prove, that doctrines expressed in terms technical and scholastic, not to say contradictory, are at all revealed in the word of God; more, that they are *clearly* revealed; and much more difficult, that they are clearly revealed as *fundamental*, and *essential to be believed in order to salvation*. Where in the discourses of Christ and his apostles are these doctrines clearly stated? I affirm, and I shall not be contradicted, that in the book of God they are not found expressed in the terms used in the complaint. Our blessed Lord and Master, in speaking of fundamentals, used a simpler style. He declared, *He who heareth my sayings and doeth them is founded on a rock; he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.* And when Peter confessed, *Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God*, Jesus approved and blessed him; and on this profession, a fundamental of great simplicity, declared he would build his church. Is it not presumptuous then in men to declare their fellow men excluded from salvation who admit the fundamentals which Christ has taught, but refuse subscription to words and phrases of human coinage?

Let it be carefully observed, that I have been condemned, not for disbelieving the sacred scriptures, the whole and every part of which I sincerely believe ; but I have been condemned for not believing and not preaching as essential to salvation, *fallible explanations* of the sacred book ; condemned as *essentially renouncing the scriptures*, while all I call in question is human interpretations ; condemned as *denying the Messiah of the gospel* and *making shipwreck of the faith*, while I believe and preach that *Jesus is the Christ of God, is the way, the truth, and the life*, and that *other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*.

Thus believing, who has a right to declare me, in point of faith, incompetent “*to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, and to feed the church of the Lord** which he has purchased with his own blood ?

But I will not extend my remarks upon all the exceptionable parts of this result, I should be tedious to the reader. I will sum the whole with respect to jurisdiction and the complaint in one general remark. Every one of five points was essential to be maintained on their part, as the ground and justification of their proceeding ; as,

1. That a Consociation had been organized in the county of Tolland.
2. That the pastor of the first church in Coventry had, some time or other, consented to its jurisdiction.
3. That councils have authority to decide in matters of faith beyond what sacred scripture decides.
4. It should have appeared that the complaint contained positive and specific charges.
5. That the opinions, or rather phrases in question, are essential.

It is confidently believed that not one of these points has been established, or can be ; and that their decision is therefore unauthorized.

* *Kupiov*, Lord, is the correct reading. It is unfortunate that my brethren of the council had not known that learned Trinitarians consider the reading of *Θεον*, God, in this text, as unsupported by any good MS. and that Athanasius himself would have shuddered at the mention of *the blood of God* ; an expression, which, however familiar it is becoming in the mouths of one or two divines in this vicinity, is shocking to all consistent Trinitarians, as it is a virtual denial of the *humanity of Christ*, and an impious assertion of the *materiality of God*.

Notwithstanding this, the council *feel themselves required by Jesus Christ the great God and Saviour;*" &c. This is a very solemn and imposing style, and the declaration may be sincere; but I doubt the propriety of adopting it. They had before declared their belief, that they were convoked or had jurisdiction *agreeably to the mind and will of Christ;* and here that *they feel required by him,* to pronounce a particular decision. On neither point is it pretended that the mind of Christ is declared in the scriptures; and if not, do my brethren pretend to revelation? or are they so blessed with the unction of the Spirit, that they are competent to declare the mind of Christ, independently of the revelation of it in the gospel? If the council disclaim so high a pretension, I cannot but regard their solemn and *unqualified* expressions in both cases, as highly exceptionable. An uncandid observer would be likely to remark, that it was a profession of regard to Christ the better to cover an unauthorized act; in short to satisfy the world, that the good end they had in view would justify the means, if there were some degree of irregularity in them.

But cautious should be every appeal to God, and cautious the attempt to justify a doubtful measure by endeavouring to stamp upon it the seal of his authority. *My brethren, be not many masters, lest ye fall into the greater condemnation.* There is not less "*peril*" in assuming the judgment seat of Christ, than in tolerating an erring brother in the sacred office. The parable in Matth. xviii. 23, &c. is in point, and deserves in connection with this subject a frequent perusal.

It appears very novel, if not a contradiction in terms, that the Consociation *revoke* a commission they never gave. If ordination confers a commission, I received it from a mutual council, not from Consociation, which has never in a single instance conferred ordination in the county of Tolland. Might it not be as correct and regular that an English bishop should *recal* the commission of a presbyterian, and the presbytery the orders of an episcopalian, and that both should find themselves deposed in a Roman consistory?

There is one circumstance further, by no means the least considerable in this rash proceeding. Grant to the council their own definition of heresy, which is denied them I think by scripture and by the ablest and most approved critics in

sacred literature, and how can their *haste* be justified? What gross disregard of the apostolic injunction, *A heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject.* Here is conviction, if such it can be called, and judgment, and sentence, and execution in a breath. Where was displayed the tenderness, the patience, the compassion, the solicitude and the effort to reclaim an erring brother, which the gospel renders indispensable in christians? What precedent in ecclesiastic annals have they followed? Even pope Leo X. when complaint was made against Luther, long endeavoured to reclaim him; and when he finally issued his *bull* to depose him from the office of the christian ministry and ^{to} exclude him from the church, Luther was allowed sixty days to renounce his errors and avoid the execution of the sentence.

These remarks upon the result I have thought necessary in order to correct misstatements and to set facts before the publick, and to exhibit the reasons, by which I have felt myself sacredly obligated to disregard the decision of the council, and to esteem it of no effect upon my ministerial and christian standing. Having presented these facts and reasons, I feel no anxiety with respect to standing justified to every candid and impartial mind..

Impartial men have freely given their opinion, that it would have been advisable to continue to discharge my pastoral duties in the same manner as if no council had interfered in my affairs, so long as a great majority of the society was disposed to attend on my ministry. I thought it due to the council, however, as a mark of respect, and due to the feelings of the society, as well as to my own character, to "submit the standing of the pastor and the expediency of his continuing in the ministry in this place" to a new council.

The selection of elders to compose this council I trust will meet with general approbation. That they might be men, feeling no degree of prejudice and subjected to no degree of improper influence in the case, they were selected from churches without the county, and without the state. In this measure I am authorized by a memorable example in the church history of the state. When dissention in the church in Hartford had long raged and had failed to be settled by Connecticut councils, by the advice of the legislature repeatedly

given, a council from Massachusetts convened once and again, and differences were happily composed. On the present occasion men of age and experience were selected, men who are in high esteem at home, and who as authors are known and respected abroad; most of whom have had the highest honours of the universities conferred upon them, and several of them received these tokens of respect from the university in this state, and have been selected by their brethren, and by the highest civil and military authority, to preach on the most important occasions. These facts I detail to render known my solicitude and care to have a second council which should be entitled to general confidence. I need only add, that with the majority of the council I had little personal acquaintance, and no knowledge of their opinion with respect to my religious sentiments or particular difficulties.

The following letter from the Rev. Dr. Osgood, who was requested to be of the council, I give to the reader entire, as applicable to several points in the preceding narrative and remarks.

REV. ABIEL ABBOT, PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN
COVENTRY.

Medford, May 22, 1811.

SIR,

THOUGH my transient acquaintance with you, and my knowledge of your father, grandfather, family and kindred in general, seem to give me an interest in you above what I might feel for an utter stranger; yet, as the state of my health and circumstances of my family do not admit of a journey to Coventry, you must excuse my non-compliance with your request. I sincerely sympathize with you under your difficulties; but as those difficulties appear to have been enhanced by an ex parte council already, it seems doubtful whether they can be removed by another council of the same general nature. If it be urged that the influence of the second may counterbalance that of the first; yet, if in reason and equity there be no weight in either, what occasion can there be for the balance? For myself I have little faith in or respect for ecclesiastical councils; I have long thought them unauthorized in scripture, and for the most part worse than useless, excepting as mere referees or

arbiters, mutually chosen by parties at variance, for settling their disputes. If they be not thus chosen by both parties, I know not what prospect there can be of any salutary effect. Ex parte councils may succeed each other ad infinitum without the least hope of effecting an accommodation. The party which rejects the proposal of a mutual council for adjusting their differences, unquestionably violates the golden rule of doing as they would be done by. If your dissatisfied brethren persist in refusing to submit the grounds of their complaint to judges mutually chosen, by making them this offer you appear to have done all that can, by the rules of the gospel or by the dictates of reason, be expected from you; and *they* must appear to the world as unfair, unjust and oppressive; in short, as the culpable party. They might, with as much propriety, have dissolved your pastoral relation and disqualified you for the ministry by their own immediate authority, as by that of those persons whom they themselves exclusively constituted judges in the case. In reality there is no difference. It is indeed a most extraordinary procedure in this land of republican liberty, where all ecclesiastical establishments are explicitly disclaimed. This consideration however assures you, that though the tongues and pens of ecclesiastical councils be as free and unrestrained as those of any other description of citizens, yet they have no power to execute their decrees; and you have no more reason to tremble at the anathema of the *Consociation of Tolland county*, than at a bull of the Roman pontiff. It might therefore perhaps be advisable to let it pass with as little notice, suffering it to have no other effect but to render you a better christian and a better man.

Any trouble of this kind, my brother, like all other troubles, ought to be rightly improved: It should lead us to self-inspection and self-examination: It should put us upon inquiring whether we have not been chargeable with something amiss, imprudent, or at least, unguarded? Whether we have been sufficiently circumspect, cautious and tender with respect to the weaknesses and prejudices of our brethren? Whether we have not shocked those prejudices by an unnecessary avowal of bold and singular opinions? Among the first converts composing the church at Corinth, there were some who, after their profession of christianity, retained a degree of religious

reverence for the idols which they had formerly worshipped. A tincture of idolatry is still mingled with the piety of no small proportion of our fellow christians, even in these modern times. It taints the minds of many serious and good characters. They reverence the writings of inspired men ; they have almost an equal reverence for the writings and dogmas of some men confessedly uninspired. Like the mingled people sent to inhabit the cities of Samaria, who associated with the God of Israel, the gods of their respective countries and nations, multitudes of our christian brethren associate with the apostles, the heads and leaders of their respective sects ; and the formulas, creeds and confessions drawn up by the latter, are hardly discriminated from scripture itself ; nay, in their estimation, to doubt of the one, is an attack upon the other. The example of St. Paul in becoming all things to all men, should teach us the utmost condescension and gentleness towards these infirmities of our brethren. They are not to be despised or disregarded. As a nurse cherisheth her children, we must be always careful in providing their spiritual food, that it contain nothing difficult to their swallow or digestion. If, with respect to the things now mentioned, conscience should acquit us of all blame, still it may not be amiss further to inquire whether, as watchmen, we have been vigilant and attentive ; in our lives and conversation, strictly exemplary ; in our pastoral duties, earnest and laborious ? Whether we have exhibited that zeal in religion, that fervour and spirit of devotion, which ought to set us above the suspicion of being wanting in any of the essential qualifications of good and faithful ministers ; certain it is, that our trouble should prove a stimulus to yet greater diligence and fidelity in all the duties of our holy calling, brightening our light, and rendering it still more splendid.

It is collected from your letter that a great majority of the congregation still adhere to you, are satisfied with your services, and are willing to contribute to your support. Why then should you not continue to officiate as heretofore, discharging all pastoral duties to those to whom they may be acceptable ? A mutual council being the only just, rational and scriptural remedy for the risen uneasiness ; after this has been refused, the aggrieved brethren must be left to take their

own course. If a number of the former communicants should choose to withdraw, some perhaps may remain, and to these success in your labours will make frequent additions till, in a short time, your church may be as full and respectable as ever. That the cloud at present overshadowing you may thus pass away is, and will continue to be, the earnest prayer of your brother in the kingdom and patience of Christ.

DAVID OSGOOD.

Letters also have been received from the First and North churches in Salem, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Drs. Barnard and Prince, declining attendance in council at Coventry, but filled with sentiments of attachment to the great principle of the reformation. The limits of this publication will not admit the letters at length; but I cannot withhold the following articles extracted from their church covenants; one of which was adopted as early as 1629: "We give ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and the word of his grace for the teaching, ruling and sanctifying of us in matters of worship and conversation, resolving to cleave to him alone for life and glory, and reject all contrary ways, constitutions and canons of men in his worship." "We profess our firm belief of the holy scriptures, contained in the Old and New Testament, and that we take them for our sole and sufficient rule of faith and practice."

A statement of facts and documents embracing the most important part of what has been laid before the reader; occurrences subsequent to the meeting of Consociation; my situation in relation to the church and to the clergy in the vicinity, with a declaration of my opinions in regard to the articles of charge, and with some remarks on past proceedings, were exhibited to the council.

The society also by their advocate was heard, and a full disclosure made of their situation and of their wishes.

The council having heard and considered the statements of the pastor and society, published the following

RESULT.

Coventry, June 5, 1811.

IN pursuance of letters missive from the pastor and first ecclesiastical society in Coventry, the following elders and messengers assembled at the house of the Rev. Abiel Abbot.

Boston, Rev. JOHN LATHROP, D. D.

Bridgewater, Rev. JOHN REED, D. D.

Roxbury, Rev. ELIPHALET PORTER, D. D.

Worcester, Rev. AARON BANCROFT, D. D.

Deacon WILLIAM TROWBRIDGE.

Weston, Rev. SAMUEL KENDAL, D. D.

Brother ISAAC HOBBS.

Duxborough, Rev. JOHN ALLEN.

Lancaster, Rev. NATHANIEL THAYER,

Brother JOSIAH BRIDGE.

The council formed by choosing Rev. John Lathrop, D. D. moderator, and Rev. Nathaniel Thayer, scribe.

Voted, that the Rev. Mr. Abbot and the committee of the society be informed, that the council are now in session, and are ready to receive any communications from them.

Voted, that the following message be sent to the deacons of the church, to be communicated.

“An ecclesiastical council, of which the Rev. John Lathrop, D. D. is moderator, is now in session in this place, at the request of the Rev. Abiel Abbot and the first ecclesiastical society in Coventry, and will be happy to receive from the first church in Coventry any communications they may be pleased to lay before them.

Coventry, June 5, 1811.

N. B. The council have voted to adjourn to the meeting house, and will be in session this afternoon, at 2 o'clock.

To Deacons Nathan Howard and David Hale.

To this message no reply has been made.

Voted to adjourn to 2 o'clock this afternoon, then to meet at the meeting house.

Assembled at the meeting house agreeably to adjournment.

The Rev. moderator led in an address to the throne of divine grace. Attended to various communications of the Rev. Mr. Abbot, and of the advocate for the society, in order as appears

on file, and from these learned the measures adopted by the church and society in relation to existing difficulties.

After hearing the arguments on the part of the society, attended to some paragraphs of a sermon of the late President Stiles on "the Christian Union." These displayed the nature of Consociations, the independence of the New England churches, and the spirit of christian liberty.

Voted to adjourn to the house of the Rev. Abiel Abbot, there to meet at the expiration of one hour.

Met at the time appointed.

Chose Rev. Drs. Lathrop, Reed, Porter, Bancroft, and the Rev. Mr. Thayer a committee to prepare a result.

Voted that the council adjourn to tomorrow at 7 o'clock, A. M.

June 6. Convened at the hour assigned.

The council having taken into consideration the christian and ministerial standing of the Rev. Abiel Abbot, and the expediency of his continuing in the ministry, voted unanimously to publish the following result:

—————
RESULT OF COUNCIL.

It is with reluctance that the members of this council have consented to take any part in relation to the unhappy divisions which have arisen in this place, and which more immediately respect the christian edification, peace and order of the churches in this vicinity and state. We feel ourselves impelled however by a principle of sympathy and benevolence, and by a sense of duty to our common Lord and Master, not to refuse our attention, opinions and advice when they are earnestly solicited by a respectable ecclesiastical society, and a christian pastor who received his education and approbation as a preacher of the gospel in that part of the country in which we reside, and whom we have long known, respected and loved.

This council have, as they trust, attended with seriousness and impartiality to the statements and pleas of the parties at whose instance they are convened. They lament the divisions which have arisen between the church on one side, and the pastor and congregation on the other. It is with extreme reluctance that the council are constrained to give an opinion which will militate with the result of the venerable council, composed of elders and messengers of the churches of Tol-

land county, recently convoked in this place ; but as it becomes necessary that they should decide on questions submitted to their deliberation, propriety requires that they give the reasons of their decision.

The council find no satisfactory evidence that a Consociation ever existed in Tolland county, according to Saybrook platform. If a Consociation did exist, they find no evidence, that the first church in Coventry or its pastor were ever constituent parts of it ; and as the Rev. Mr. Abbot and the ecclesiastical society declined acting with this church in calling the late council, and protested against its jurisdiction, we can consider it only in the light of an *ex parte* council ; and as the not having of a mutual council as the umpire of their controversy must in our opinion be imputed to the church, the result of said council cannot affect the ministerial standing of the Rev. Mr. Abbot, much less dissolve the pastoral relation between him and this people.

Concerning the doctrinal points which are the only articles of charge alleged against Mr. Abbot we will not decide, in the persuasion that the Great Head of the church never empowered any body of men to pronounce authoritatively respecting religious opinions. We believe that Mr. Abbot is sincere in the following solemn declaration, and that it ought to be satisfactory.

“ There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things ; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things. Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

“ Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the brightness of the Father’s glory and express image of his person ; and in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.

There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. He hath suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. In him we have redemption through his blood ; he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. By him we believe in God, that raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.

“ After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost ; that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. To him that believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

“ I acknowledge and sincerely receive the sacred scriptures as divine truth, and firmly believe and preach them as an infallible guide of faith and duty. And while I claim for myself the right of searching and judging their true meaning, I disclaim the right of binding others by my interpretations, and of condemning them for differing in opinion from me.”

We are persuaded that his inquiries have been in the love of truth, and his sentiments communicated in the spirit of the christian ; and we will not set at nought our brother for the exercise of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, for we must all stand at his judgment seat. The pages of ecclesiastical history through a period of eighteen hundred years contain abundant evidence, that the attempt to unite christians under human creeds and formularies has uniformly issued in a struggle for superiority, in the alienation of christian brethren, and in divisions in the church. Is it not then time, that the disciples of one common Master unite under his authority, and make his gospel without addition or diminution the basis of ministerial intercourse and christian communion ? The sufficiency of the scriptures as a rule of faith and practice is the great principle of the reformation from popery, and it is the only ground on which protestant christians can securely stand.

The council consider the relation between the pastor and this ecclesiastical society as not having been annulled ; and the parties having submitted the expediency of its continuance to this council, we do therefore adjudge that the relation between them be dissolved for the reasons which follow :

We apprehend that the divisions which exist in the church and society are of such a nature, as render it highly improbable, that the end of the christian ministry can in future be promoted by the official labours of Mr. Abbot. As it respects the church and society, we entertain the hope that this

act of christian condescension of the majority to the ardent wishes of the minority will be the means to restore their former harmony and love, and that in the spirit of mutual forbearance and charity they will be united in a minister by whom they all may be edified. This measure we deem necessary for the future comfort and usefulness of the pastor, and in conformity to the will of our divine Master, that his ministers who cannot be useful in one city flee to another.

And therefore, being authorized as aforesaid, we do hereby declare the relation between the Rev. Abiel Abbot and the first ecclesiastical society in Coventry dissolved.

This council unreservedly express their favourable opinion of the ministerial qualifications of the Rev. Mr. Abbot. His intellectual powers, his literary and theological attainments, the diligence of his research after truth, his prudence, candour and charity, the excellence of his moral character, and his affability and tenderness in the intercourse with the people of his charge, in our view fit him in a high degree for the office of a christian pastor; and with deep sorrow we find that circumstances exist, which render it expedient for him to take a dismission from a society, the great majority of whom manifest a warm attachment to his person and ministry. This council cordially recommend the Rev. Mr. Abbot to all christian societies among whom he may in divine providence be called to minister.

This council did not cross the line of their state with an inclination to oppose themselves to their christian brethren in Connecticut; but, as they trust, in the spirit of that gospel, which has made charity the distinguishing mark of its disciples. They will themselves, and in expressing this sentiment they are assured that they speak the language of their brethren in Massachusetts, rejoice to cooperate in all measures which are fitted to promote christian union and fellowship, as well as in those which subserve the purposes of the civil and literary institutions of the two sister states.

The council subjoin their earnest supplications to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that he would have this christian people, and him who hath long laboured with them in word and doctrine, in his holy keeping, and grant them the bles-

sings of the gospel of peace. May this his servant be again honoured and improved in the work of the ministry.

May we all, having passed through this state of imperfection and trial, meet in heaven, where we shall see as we are seen, and be perfected in the whole will of God.

JOHN LATHROP, *Moderator.*

Attest, NATHANIEL THAYER, *Scribe.*

Upon the whole extraordinary narrative, which I have now completed, I cannot withhold a few remarks to the christian publick. The scene at Coventry is closed, as it regards me ; I am further interested only as a private member of the religious community. But I feel a concern much greater then I can express, that the unauthorized proceeding at Coventry should not pass into a precedent, and be hereafter appealed to, to justify intolerance and domination over conscience.

It is very manifest to any careful observer of what is passing, that there is forming and strengthening a combination in New England, to awe the spirit of inquiry and the liberty of conscience and private judgment in regard to the holy scriptures. It has been boldly declared in publick assembly, that a minister cannot subsist in Connecticut, who presumes to differ from the general opinions embraced by the clergy and churches. There is substantial evidence of the fact in my case, that such a man *cannot live in peace*, cannot subsist without assault and perpetual hostility. This is a new thing in our country ; it is without precedent. It is that very spirit of oppression from which our ancestors fled into a wilderness. To enjoy liberty of conscience and private judgment they fled from Britain to Holland, and from Holland to America.

The men I know very well, who now advocate intolerance, pretend to the countenance of our ancestors. It is pretension, and nothing more. Their early institutions, their language on all occasions, contradict the assumption. I appeal to testimony the most decisive. I appeal to the father of the first settlement in New England, the great, the immortal Robinson, the learned and orthodox minister of the Puritans in Holland. O for a spirit of enlightened zeal, of reverence for scripture, as the sole authoritative guide and inexhaustible fountain of truth, of caution with respect to human authority,

and of candour to all inquirers after truth, which breathes in the admirable exhortation, addressed to a part of his charge when he dismissed them to America. Before he kneeled down with them upon the sea shore to commend them to God, these were his words : "I charge you before God and his blessed angels that ye follow me no farther than ye have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveal any thing to you by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it, as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry ; for I am verily persuaded, I am very confident, that the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of his word. For my part I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches who are come to a period in religion, and will go, at present, no farther than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw ; whatever part of his will our good God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it. And the Calvinists you see stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things."

There is nothing surprising in this candid exhortation ; it was all of a peace with his leaving England ; it was all in consonance with the principle of the reformation from popery. While shaking from his conscience the chains which the pope or the English church would gladly have riveted, he disclaimed the right, the desire to impose them on the consciences of his charge ; nor would he countenance the imposition in others. How different is the language which is now heard ; and how diverse the temper which ministers now breathe ? The discoveries of the first reformers, in the moment of bursting from papal darkness, are assumed as truth, and as the whole truth, and all attempt to go beyond them, or even to examine what they taught, seems to be thought little less impious than to assail the sacred scriptures themselves.

Will they, who breath this new spirit, so strange to our fathers and so incompatible with the gospel, fly to the confession of later fathers, to the platform of Cambridge and Saybrook for countenance ? They find no countenance, they find no quarter here. It is as impossible to justify their decision by the platform, as to prove their jurisdiction by it. Did not the council feel this difficulty in its full force ? They ground

their decision on no article of the platform, proved or *supposed* to be broken by me; but themselves first form a canon, and declare the pastor to have infringed it, and proceed to his deposition. Had they appealed to the platform they would have been arrested in a score of places which assert the sufficiency of scripture, as a rule of faith; which charge the churches to abide by it as such, and to be cautious of admitting any other authoritative rule of faith.

Will they ask, What then meant the Saybrook fathers by their confession of faith? I answer promptly, they meant it for *example*, not for *authority*. They had the same design, as writers of German confessions before them professed to have had, to *declare* their own views of scripture, not to *impose* them upon others.

Shall I be charged with indifference to truth? with adopting the loose and profane maxim, That it matters not what a man believes? I adopt no such principle; I feel no such indifference. Nay, I regard inquiry after truth, not only an inalienable privilege, but an indispensable duty. It is urged upon me in the word of God by many solemn charges; and the nature and influence of truth upon heart and conduct declare its importance. And it is not sufficient that I adopt truth at second hand; that I take it upon trust from men of great mind and unquestioned piety, or from the confessions of councils and synods. As I would answer it to God and to conscience, I must receive truth not upon human, but divine authority; and therefore must search for it, not in the creeds of men, but in the word of God.

With the greatest propriety might I retort upon my accusers the charge of indifference to truth. For what is this zeal for creeds, expressed in human terms, but indifference, if not to divine truth, at least to the sacred garb in which heaven has clothed it?

It is a precious hope which I indulge, that the sufferings and privations which I have sustained will awaken the attention of the publick mind, and lead the churches to serious consideration. Liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment are things sacred; he is chargeable with profaneness, who parts with the divine birthright. Let all who prize the liberty with which Christ has made them free, in this grand

respect guard it against all imposition of the few, and of the many.

If the declaration above alluded to be correct, that a minister cannot subsist in Connecticut, who presumes to differ from the general opinions embraced by the clergy and churches, the free exercise of private judgment is at an end. It is in vain that you be indulged the free reading of the scriptures, if you be denied the privilege of interpreting them. It is in vain that you search for doctrines in the word of God, if you must resign them for the dogmas in the creeds of men. In a word, if the minister and the private christian must believe, that is, interpret scripture, precisely as the church, ~~as~~ the elders, as the Consociation, as the General Association shall dictate, then farewell protestantism. We behold the establishment of papacy in Connecticut with this difference, that for a pope in one man, we have a pope composed of many; and instead of the secular arm brandishing the torch and turning the wheel, we have deposition from office and loss of living; we have the more harmless, yet still dreadful thunder of censure and excommunication.

If this be a desirable state of things; if this be the best method of promoting the knowledge and the experience of true religion; if the papal maxim be just, that *ignorance is the mother of devotion*; then no alarm need be entertained by the religious publick on account of this bold assumption of power over conscience; and this claim of infallibility to some, and denial of private judgment to others.

My fathers and brethren of the first council will indulge me in a few words addressed to them on an occasion of much interest to them and me. Through this whole narrative, I have not been unmindful of our mutual respect and friendship in years past. You must not construe the fervour with which I attempt to plead the cause of truth and liberty into any change of my affectionate sentiments towards you. It is not among my maxims, that there can be no unity of affection without unity of opinion. Nor is it my custom always to ascribe conduct the most incorrect to principles the most depraved. I impeach not your sincerity on this lamented occasion; I trust you have acted according to the dictates of conscience. But at the same time I feel the deepest conviction of

the irregularity of your proceeding, and the most painful apprehension of the consequences, inauspicious to the cause of Christ our common Lord and Master, which may result from it. Is it sufficient that you were sincere? Paul *verily thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*; that he must persecute men, women and children, and drag them to prison and to death. And in more modern times, Calvin, another great and pious man, on account of difference of opinion, thought proper to countenance, if not to procure the death of Servetus at the stake. My brethren will not esteem Paul or Calvin as blameless in this unhallowed zeal, because they were conscientious. Paul at least, in the most humiliating terms, lamented and condemned his conduct. Suffer me then to beseech you to review the part you have acted in reference to the pastor and church in Coventry. Consider the advice given to the church's committee at Willington. I offered a mutual council; was it *just* to disregard that offer? I remonstrated against Consociation with uniform usage to support me; was it candid and fraternal, and according to the golden rule, to advise the church to call it?

Consider the countenance given to schism on the part of a few of my charge. Was it unknown to you, that the church as well as society were satisfied and, as I indulge the hope, edified by my preaching, before unwearyed pains on the part of two members had awakened suspicion? Can the step be reconciled with a multitude of exhortations in the sacred scriptures, to *preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*; to *mark them that cause divisions and offences*, that is, *occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them*, that you immediately lent your support to the utmost extent of their wishes; and this without one effort to enlighten, to convince, or to admonish the pastor, if you esteemed him an erring brother!

It is the observation of one of the most eminent Scotch divines and biblical criticks, that "no person who, in the spirit of candour and charity, adheres to that which, to the best of his judgment, is right, though in this opinion he should be mistaken, is, in the scriptural sense either schismatick or here-

tick ; he, on the contrary, whatever sect he belongs to, is more entitled to these odious appellations, who is apt to throw the imputation on others. Both terms, for they denote only different degrees of the same bad quality, always indicate a disposition unfriendly to peace, harmony and love." If this be a just account of heresy according to the scriptures, and I hope you will carefully examine to see, you will have reason to fear that you have been aiding schism and abetting heresy. "We must beware lest we misconceive or pervert the scriptures on this head, and through blind zeal make conscience of doing wrong. It is possible we may condemn sound doctrine on pretence of love of truth; and may reject those whom we ought to think their Master receives ; and may refuse communion on earth to those whom we ought to be willing to take with us to heaven ; and whom, if the mercy of God to his erring, offending creatures permits us to arrive there, we shall, notwithstanding our present shyness and aversion, or denunciations and anathemas, be obliged to meet in that happy place, and be ready to acknowledge as even better men than ourselves."

The application of a church has something in it imposing, and may have misled you to a conclusion too hasty. It is to be lamented that the church makes so small a part of the society, and the male members so small a part of the church. But piety is not exclusively confined to the church, nor zeal and sincerity to the male professors. If the wishes, if the tears and supplications of the great majority of my charge were entitled to tenderness and consideration, it can be no subject of pleasing reflexion to you, that they were disregarded.

But I forbear ; and only add my sincere prayer to God, that he would guide both you and me into all necessary truth, and preserve us from fatal error ; that he would prosper your ministrations to the salvation of your people ; that he would graciously prevent or heal divisions in your charges ; and save you, in the decline of life, from the bitter affliction of being separated from those you love in the Lord.

The pastoral relation is one of the most sacred and endearing upon earth ; and when the minister and people have long lived together in mutual esteem and affection, the ties which

bind them are tender beyond expression. A thousand circumstances, better felt than described, have had an influence upon the parties. Their weekly assemblies ; his visits in the chambers of the sick ; his instructions, sympathy and condolence in the chambers of death and mourning ; sweet counsel imparted to minds in the different states of alarm, conviction, comfort and joy in believing ; and even the solemn admonition and painful rebuke given to the careless and profane ; have been means of annually extending and improving the attachment of pastor and people. So that when they come together every pew presents to his eye some interesting object, and recalls to his mind some painful or joyous association. These are circumstances in almost every minister's case, of equal importance to his comfort and usefulness. But I feel them at this time painfully ; and adding to these the many afflictive circumstances attending the close of my ministry, and the agitated sensibility of pastor and people, I have thought it difficult, if not impossible, and therefore inexpedient to attempt to express, in the place of our solemnities, my parting counsel and benediction. It will not therefore be thought improper, I hope, that I close this pamphlet with a brief address to my late charge.

Beloved friends and fellow christians,

Sixteen years of the meridian of my life I have devoted to your service ; with what sincerity and zeal on my part, and with what improvement on yours, it now seriously concerns us both to inquire. The connexion is dissolved ; and my ministry should be the subject of solemn review, that we may learn how I have preached and how you have heard, not for the purpose of mutual crimination, but that each of us may prepare to give account of himself to God. It becomes us all, my brethren, and each, to acknowledge, *If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me ; if I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.* Let us all look up to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who remembereth that we are dust, with humble confession and supplication, and hope of his mercy.

With much imperfection I have laboured among you ; but have kept back nothing that I thought profitable unto you for

doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; for the alarm of the sinner, and for the comfort of the mourner for sin. Subjects on which I have laboured to fix your minds and hearts are the perfections, and providence, and government of the God of heaven; his grace displayed in the character and offices of Jesus his only begotten son and brightest image, of Christ and him crucified; the truth and authority of the sacred scriptures, which holy men of God spake and recorded, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. I have dwelt much on those doctrines, which Christ commanded to the first preachers as the sum of the gospel, *repentance and remission of sins*. I have laboured to enforce upon you the necessity of the christian temper in all its branches, and of obedience to all the moral and positive precepts of the gospel. To carry alarm to the careless and profane, and to animate the dull christian and cheer the gloomy, I have made my frequent appeal to the world to come, and by the terrors and mercies of the Lord persuaded men to be reconciled to God. I have exhorted you to godliness with fervour, as if your salvation depended upon your own exertions; yet have shown you that, when you have done all, you will be unprofitable servants, and *must look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*. These, and subjects correlative and branching from them, have been the most frequent themes of my addresses to you. I have repeated them, my brethren, as articles of self examination. In what manner, and with what effect have you listened to these great doctrines of grace and salvation? What influence have they manifestly had upon your hearts and your lives? and what fruits meet for repentance have you displayed? and what evidence of the faith, which works by love, which purifies the heart, and overcomes the world, have you to appeal to, as the ground of your personal comfort, and as the reason to others of the hope that is in you? I earnestly press upon you this solemn inquiry, and beseech you that my feeble but well meant labours may not be in vain in the Lord.

This much by way of review. How shall I utter the tender solicitude which I feel, in contemplating your present circumstances. *Sheep you are without a shepherd*. Such a state of the flock is always perilous, even when the hand of

God is more directly visible in the bereavement. Somewhat more delicate and critical are your circumstances. The state of the church and society for months past has been most unhappy ; it has gendered animosity ; it has effected a high degree of irritation ; it has tended to separate chief friends ; and to occasion shiness and suspicion. My heart revolts from the picture. O my brethren, I offer myself a suppliant with you all, and entreat you to be calm, and candid, and conciliatory ; to consult the things which make for peace ; and to heal the mutual wounds with which you are bleeding. Remember that you are brethren, and are associated with each other in civil and sacred bonds, which you have a common interest not to sever, and not to render galling and painful. I *have* seen you all united and happy ; it was the golden season of our connexion. Let there be a faithful effort to regain that pleasant state, so friendly to the exercise of gospel graces. To this end, you must with one consent bury the past ; extinguish the coals of strife ; stifle the voice of crimination ; and, as far as possible, suppress the rising thought of suspicion. Accept the counsel of Peter—*Laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby* ; and the advice of Paul—*You that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please yourselves.* Let not things unessential and offensive be urged to the widening of the breach ; nor innovations attempted at a season, when they will be regarded with jealousy and disgust. How dignified and gentle was Paul ; *If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.* Like him, consent to wave some things, which you desire, and which to you may seem nourishing, if to others they be offensive and occasions of stumbling. That great apostle had other maxims of conduct, which properly understood are admirable to guide the private christian, as well as the minister—*To become all things to all men and to please a neighbour for his good to edification.* This last maxim he recommends by the highest example ; *For even Christ, he adds, pleased not himself.*

These sacred hints, my brethren, if adopted, will have admirable influence in composing your agitations. Let the law

of kindness be in your hearts and its speech distil from your tongues, and mutual condescension bow your hearts together. Happy end ! which most devoutly I desire to see attained. And this not chiefly for the blessing and comfort of peace, great and desirable as they are ; but that you may be in a state favourable to the resettlement of the gospel among you ; that you may happily unite in the election and support of a man after God's own heart, who may feed you with knowledge and understanding. Much of my solicitude and affliction will be relieved should I be so blessed as to see you in the care of a faithful minister.

In the mean time, apply diligently to that living fountain of divine truth, the sacred scriptures, to which it has been my ceaseless object to direct and urge you. Here you will find truth unperverted and pure ; and discern what you *must be* to be christians, and what you *shall be*, if you attain that high and blessed character. I can never sufficiently recommend them, nor you with zeal and patience proportioned to their importance study them. It is a character given of a portion of the scriptures that they are hard to be understood ; but be cautious never to wrest them ; and remember for your relief, that the most intelligible parts are the most important ; and that the path of truth and conduct essential for you to discover and pursue in order to salvation, the prophet describes, *as a high way so plain that wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein.*

It must not be forgotten that it is not more your privilege than it is your duty, to judge of yourselves what is right and true. You cannot therefore innocently resign this right to others, or wrest it from them. On this point most cordially do I approve and recommend the thoughts of that excellent man of God, Dr. Doddridge. "Truth is indeed too sacred a thing ever to be denied on any consideration ; and so far as we are in our own consciences persuaded that any particular truth is important, neither honour nor charity will allow us to give it up, as a point of mere indifferent speculation. Let us therefore ever be ready, when properly called out to the service, to plead its cause in the name of the God of truth ; but let it be in a manner worthy of him, a manner which may not offend him as the God of love. And let us be greatly upon our

guard that we do not condemn our brethren, as having forfeited all title to the name of christians, because their creeds or confessions of faith do not come up to the standard of our own. Yea, if it were in a matter which seemed of so great importance as to give us some room to suspect that the mistake were fatal, (which surely nothing can be that does not greatly affect men's temper and conduct towards God and each other) even that consideration should engage us to gentleness and tenderness, rather than severity to them ; if peradventure our friendly and respectful carriage may gain such a happy ascendant over their minds, as to remove their prejudices against our reasons."

My beloved people, it would gratify my feelings to prolong this address ; to indulge the effusion of an affectionate, grateful, and anxious heart in counsels and consolations suited to every age, and class, and character. But I must not too far intrude on the patience of the publick. Suffer me to admonish you, and I desire to have it continually in my own mind, that we shall soon stand together before the judgment seat of Christ ; may we find mercy of the Lord in that day. Be watchful, therefore, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. Remember how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent. Be animated by the promise, *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment* ; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory ; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others.

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

APPENDIX.

No. I.

THE following extracts, consonant with the design of many of the remarks in the preceding pages, are taken from "a Discourse on the Christian Union," by the late President Stiles, who was very highly esteemed by all the clergy in Connecticut, and whose praise is in the churches.

" We agree in the belief of the inspiration of the scriptures—we believe that they contain an authentic and the only infallible account of the whole system of revelation made from time to time to mankind—and that they are a *sufficient* rule of faith and practice. Our churches, God be thanked, are not yet deeply tinged with deism—may God preserve them pure ! And as they yet retain the popular belief of revelation, which will abide the most severe scrutiny, so they accept the scriptures as an infallible rule. It is indeed a little unhappy, that like others in the christian world, some of us are fond of substituting human interpretations given by authority of councils and learned men, exacting that the sacred scriptures be understood according to senses fitted and defined in human tests, which all acknowledge to be fallible. But it is to be hoped that we shall stand fast in the liberty wherewith the gospel has made us free. There ought to be no restrictions on the conscience of an honest and sober believer of revelation. The right of conscience and private judgment is unalienable : And it is truly the interest of all mankind to unite themselves into one body for the liberty, free exercise and unmolested enjoyment of this right, especially in religion. Not all the difference of sentiment, not all the erroneous opinions that have yet been started, afford just umbrage for its extinction, abridgement or embarrassment. Have the protestant formularies subserved the defence of the truth as it is in Jesus ? Rather have they not in event proved new sources of religious dispute and undeterminable controversy ? The churches of Geneva have long since had the wisdom to drop this article of *consensus*, as the great disturbance of the christian harmony. And the clergy have found themselves obliged to interpret the Helvetic, and all other protestant confessions, in the scripture sense, with a *divinis veritatibus in hoc libro contentis subscribo*. I am satisfied we shall err less if we make the scriptures the only rule of faith, than if we depart from this, and substitute another; or as many do, who say they believe the scriptures the *only* rule, and yet in all their judgments on

scripture, measure that *only* rule by *another* rule. Nor do substituted rules answer the purpose of detecting heretics at all better than the primary rule, since on experience it is found none more freely subscribe and swear to human tests than deists, sceptics, and the most debauched. If God's enclosure will not keep out the erroneous, can it be expected that ours will? The universal pretext is a preservation against heresy. But it is to be remarked, that human tests make more heretics than the word of God—all that the one determines to be heresy, is not heresy by the scriptures. A man may be a very great heretic according to the one, and an excellent christian according to the other at the same time. St. Paul was one of the greatest heretics, and even gloried in his heresy, and yet was one of the best of christians. The *Waldenses* were heretics. The *Protestants* are all heretics with the *Romanists*, according to the council of *Trent*. All that can be advanced for public human tests among protestants, can and has been advanced with equal force for those of the *Romanists*: For it is not so much the real truth or error contained in these tests and formularies that is contested, as the authority by which they are imposed, which is only human, and therefore not obligatory on conscience."

"Our churches acknowledge no jurisdiction of sister churches over them; but hold themselves both capable, and to have power to determine all matters of difference that arise in a particular church. For in truth, in religion we ought all to be free; and consequently not the religious speculative opinions of a christian, one that honestly believes revelation, ought to be deemed the subject of ecclesiastical animadversion in the church, and little else besides his morals. And this every church is a complete judge of, and perhaps is seldom mistaken. And if we go beyond this, neither single churches, nor a body, nor ecumenical councils can determine: As is evident from an experiment through the long tract of time from the council of *Nice* to that of *Trent*. It must be confessed indeed, that our churches have sometimes taken on them the decision of matters, which all the power and wisdom on earth cannot determine till the second coming of Christ. But whatever is within the capacity of mortals to determine, respecting the christian discipline, the brethren are sufficient judges of. Or if they may sometimes be at a loss, they have recourse to the opinion and advice of such council as they think fit to consult, reserving to themselves a liberty to receive or refuse such advice when given. And with this assistance they can determine any thing and every thing that can be determined by mortals, whether they confine themselves to what properly belongs to them; or whether they enlarge into things which God perhaps has not determined for us, and never intended mortals should determine for one another."

“There was indeed in the year 1705, an attempt or proposal to subordinate the whole body of our churches to the jurisdiction of consociation, with final appeal to a general provincial consociation, in which all controversies were to take an ultimate issue and decision. But these proposals met with insuperable opposition, from the spirit of liberty. Dr. Cotton Mather speaking of them says, “there were some very considerable persons among the *ministers*, as well as *brethren*, who thought the *liberties* of *particular churches* to be in danger of being too much *limited* and *infringed* in them. And in deference to these good men, the proposals were never prosecuted. To these proposals of erecting spiritual judicatories, the reverend and learned Mr. John Wise of Ipswich made a very spirited reply, in a satyr, entitled “The churches quarrel espoused,” in which he shows that the vesting of consociations with judiciary and decisive powers, would in the issue be the abolition of congregationalism. And there is no reason to think this gentleman was an enemy to our churches. It was early seen to be important, that our churches should be *consociated*; but whether for the purposes of harmony only, or dominion, was as early the question. For it was seen that whatever power was ceded to the standing council, just so much was taken away from particular churches; and this clashed with the principle, that every church had power to decide its own controversies.”

“Though it [consociation] failed in the Massachusetts, yet two years after, it was resumed and carried into execution among the churches of Connecticut, which at this time were, as I take it, universally congregationalists, though several of the principal ministers were inclined to the presbyterian rule and government of churches. There were at this time about 40 churches in that colony. On the recommendation of the provincial legislature, which had been previously procured,* the *pastors* and *messengers* of the church in the four counties assembled in four separate conventions, and draughted or passed four prepared models of church discipline, as nearly resembling that of 1705 as the spirit of the churches and *pastors* would admit, for several of the principal *pastors* were truly congregational. These separate conventions delegated each perhaps two or more *pastors* with their respective *messengers*, to meet in a general convention, and compose out of the several remitted models a plan of discipline for public establishment. These delegates from the county conventions assembled at *Saybrook* in 1708, to the number of perhaps 10 or 12 *pastors*, and perhaps twice as many *messengers*.† This

* Very much through the influences of the honourable Gurdon Saltonstall, Esq. governor of the colony, a learned divine, who had been formerly one of the *pastors*.

† There were only four.

synod adopted the *Savoy confession** with the *heads of agreement*, which happily united the presbyterian and congregational brethren in *England*. Had they stopt here, the liberty of the churches had been secure. They also from the public sense, collected as above, composed *articles for the administration of church discipline*. I have been told that the model from New Haven county, said to have been draughted principally by the reverend Mr. *James Pierpoint*, was that which with some amendments passed the synod. The synod having thus combined together the *confession*, *heads of agreement*, and *articles for discipline*, as an ecclesiastical constitution, it was recommended by the general assembly of the colony, and received by most of the churches. A subsequent act of the general assembly has declared such churches as accede to this constitution, to have a *legal establishment* in that colony, not however exclusive of congregationalism, which has equally a legal establishment. Thus there are three forms of religion established in the German empire. In virtue of this agreement and constitution, the acceding churches were resolved into four consociations, which are now increased to nine. These consociations consist of two estates, the *ministers* and *messengers*, in effect separate in their acts; for though they sit, deliberate and vote together in council, yet their acts are of separate import; for being two distinct bodies in point of cognizance and jurisdiction, they are so vested with a negative on each other, that the concurrence of both in a certain new manner is necessary to complete an act of council. There at present subsists a difference of sentiment among worthy and pious men, who are real friends to the churches, respecting the *powers of churches*, and the powers of *consociations*, which shall subordinate when in competition. This difference of sentiment I take to be very little among the churches, nor between the pastors and churches in general, but chiefly among the venerable clergy. The churches as I take it make no question with respect to their own plenary and uncontrollable power. The present difference among the pastors might be healed by charity and amicable condescensions, with the retention of their respective judgments as was done the last century upon the differences between the presbyterian and congregational pastors as to church power. The litigation of pastoral controversies unespoused by the churches, especially on the subject of the pastoral powers, excepting those with which they are evidently invested by the great head of the church, is peculiarly unhappy in the present rapid increase of our churches, when it is our true interest for both pastors and churches to be cement-

* Formed and agreed to by 120 congregational churches in *England*, assembled by their messengers in the *Savoy*, *London*, 1658.

ed by benevolence and union. The pretext on one side is heresy: But heresy is to be encountered in this age by reasoning and appeals to the sacred oracles, not by the decisions of uninspired councils. If councils were by the explicit voluntary act of the churches vested with ten times more authority than is claimed for them by their warmest advocates, they could never decide the point. The scriptures are the only rule of protestants.

“But whatever be the pretexts on either side, the powers of the consociations being not known in the scriptures, are to be determined by an appeal to the platform that constitutes them. And in order to judge of this we must enter into the sense and design with which it was conceived, and that in which it was adopted by the churches, that we may reconcile those parts of it which interfere with, if they do not contradict one another. Taken literally, it in the first place stipulates the absolute unsubordinate power of particular churches. It afterwards vests the *consociated council* with authoritative final decision on all matters of discipline submitted to it by the churches of the circuit. It at length vests the council with general and original jurisdiction on “all occasions ecclesiastical.” It should seem also by some expressions, that it is vested with the *power of the keys*, the power of declaring noncommunion on a particular church. Now the question is, whether this amounts to transferring the power out of the churches into the council, in which they are thus represented? If it does, then there is a contradiction. And the next question is, upon a competition, which shall loose their power, the *particular churches*, or the *consociation*? The *decisive power* when assembled, and the power to assemble uncalled upon “all occasions ecclesiastical;” if bona fide ceded by the churches, amounts in my opinion to an entire and absolute surrendery of all power and liberty from the churches, and may in time be claimed and demanded. For with such power the consociations may interdict any ecclesiastical process in the churches on any ecclesiastical matter, and with such prohibition remove it out of the hands of a particular church into the council. There remains then but one way in which the liberties of the churches are by this constitution secured, and if this be closed, their power and privilege is a *cypher*, viz. that the standing council have no power but when called, and on the matters only submitted by the church, even this would be a surrendery of more power than is ceded to *congregational councils*, which are *advisory* only in their results; whereas the *consociated councils* are *decisive* in matters submitted by the churches. Whatever was the sense of the churches in adopting it, it is pretty evident that the platform itself is interlined with a clause vesting the consociation, not only with the decision when called by the inviting church, but with orig-

inal jurisdiction upon "all matters ecclesiastical," unless the phrase "all occasions ecclesiastical" be limited to discipline, or interpreted in subordination to the fundamental principle of the union, the uncontrollable power of particular churches.

"Let us then consider the sense in which it was received by the churches. And here we are to remark, that the platform itself provides and stipulates, that none of our particular churches shall be subordinate to one another, each being endowed with equality of power from Jesus Christ: And that none of the said particular churches, their officer or officers, shall exercise power or have any superiority over any other church or their officers." This was the basis of the union ; securing this, they agreed to unite in social confederacy and fellowship. If any subsequent expressions intermixed in the articles of agreement should seem to interfere with, and contradict this principle, so as to transfer eventually the power out of the particular church in its individuate capacity, is it to be supposed the churches ratified them? rather is it not to be supposed that they interpret them in a sense subordinate to the first principle?"

"Let the consociations be *advisory* only to the churches ; it might have a friendly influence ; an influence which one would think would content the ecclesiastical councils. But even this let it be remembered, would be but a human device of polity, neither prescribed or suggested by Christ or his apostles ; and having nothing of divine in it, not being so much as an ordinance of God, but a voluntary agreement only of men. And consequently the decisions and results of councils ought not to be put off upon the churches as an ordinance of the Most High, who is never to be brought in to patronize the fallible decrees of mortals uninspired, which are sometimes delivered to the churches in the name of God, with strong expressions, importing that the contempt and disobedience of them is contempt and disobedience of the Most High. *Nec Deus intersit nisi dignus vindice nodus.* There needs the utmost caution least the opinions and canons of councils be conceived in this light."

"In faithfulness therefore to posterity and the truth, every present generation should teach their rising offspring the essential difference between what arises from human policy and the institutes of heaven : And that as the Most High has not vested any order of men since the apostolic age with divine infallible authority, so none of their decisions on or about religion partake in the least degree of infallibility, not even the churches themselves in their particular or aggregate capacity : The ecclesiastical councils have no authority unless imparted by the churches, and this though ecclesiastical, yet not divine : And that if ever this be ceded or given up to the degree of controlling particular churches in a

perpetual constitution, posterity will again date the death of liberty from that unhappy era, till future vigorous struggles and united combined exertions of the public spirit shall resume it into those hands where God and nature placed it. The exigencies of the christian church can never be such as to legitimate, much less render it wise, to erect any body of men into a standing judicatory over the churches."

"To sum up the whole, it appears from above, 1. That our churches were originally free and independent of one another. 2. That any plan of confederacy is just what is was agreed, explicitly received and understood to be by the confederating churches. 3. That such confederacy, whatever be its form, is not *jure divino*, but entirely human and prudential; and was never designed to interfere with the independence and prerogative powers of particular churches. 4. Least of all was it designed to regulate articles of faith, it being one of the fundamental and explicit declarations of the churches, and even of the platforms, that the **SCRIPTURES** alone are the **ONLY RULE OF FAITH.**"

No. II.

The following are the articles of church discipline agreed upon at Saybrook, Sept. 1708.

"I. That the elder, or elders, of a particular church, with the consent of the brethren of the same, have power and ought to exercise church discipline, according to the rule of God's word, in relation to all scandals, that fall out within the same. And it may be meet in all cases of difficulty, for the respective pastors of particular churches, to take advice of the elders of the churches in the neighbourhood, before they proceed to censure in such cases.

"II. That the churches which are neighbouring each to other, shall consociate for mutual affording to each other such assistance, as may be requisite, upon all occasions ecclesiastical. And that the particular pastors and churches, within the respective counties in this government, shall be one consociation (or more if they shall judge meet) for the end aforesaid.

"III. That all cases of scandal, that fall out within the circuit of any of the aforesaid consociations shall be brought to a council of the elders, and also messengers of the churches within the said circuit, i. e. the churches of one consociation, if they see cause to send messengers, when there shall be need of a council for the determination of them.

“ IV. That, according to the common practice of our churches, nothing shall be deemed an act or judgment of any council, which hath not the act of the major part of the elders present concurring, and such a number of the messengers present, as makes the majority of the council: provided that if any such church shall not see cause to send any messengers to the council, or the persons chosen by them shall not attend, neither of these shall be any obstruction to the proceedings of the council, or invalidate any of their acts.

“ V. That when any case is orderly brought before any council of the churches, it shall there be heard and determined, which (unless orderly removed from thence) shall be a final issue; and all parties therein concerned shall sit down and be determined thereby. And the council so hearing, and giving the result or final issue, in the said case as aforesaid, shall see their determination or judgment duly executed and attended, in such way or manner, as shall in their judgment be most suitable and agreeable to the word of God.

“ VI. That if any pastor and church doth obstinately refuse a due attendance and conformity to the determination of the council, that hath the cognizance of the case, and determineth it as above, after due patience used, they shall be reputed guilty of scandalous contempt, and dealt with as the rule of God’s word in such case doth provide, and the sentence of non-communion shall be declared against such pastor and church. And the churches are to approve of the said sentence by withdrawing from the communion of the pastor and church which so refused to be healed.

“ VII. That in case any difficulties shall arise in any of the churches in this colony, which cannot be issued without considerable disquiet, that church, in which they arise (or that minister or member aggrieved with them,) shall apply themselves to the council of the consociated churches of the circuit to which the said church belongs, who, if they see cause shall thereupon convene, hear and determine such cases of difficulty, unless the matter brought before them shall be judged so great in the nature of it, or so doubtful in the issue, or of such general concern, that the said council shall judge best that it be referred to a fuller council, consisting of the churches of the other consociation within the same county, (or of the next adjoining consociation of another county, if there be not two consociations in the county where the difficulty ariseth) who, together with themselves, shall hear, judge, determine, and finally issue such case according to the word of God.

“ VIII. That a particular church, in which any difficulty doth arise, may, if they see cause, call a council of the consociated churches of the circuit to which the church belongs, before they proceed to sentence therein; but there is not the

same liberty to an offending brother, to call the council, before the church to which he belongs proceed to excommunication in the said case, unless with the consent of the church.

“IX. That all the churches of the respective consociations shall choose, if they see cause, one or two members of each church, to represent them in the councils of the said churches, as occasion may call for them, who shall stand in that capacity, till new be chosen for the same service, unless any church shall incline to choose their messengers anew upon the convening of such councils.

“X. That the minister or ministers of the county towns, or where there are no ministers in such towns, the two next ministers to the said town, shall, as soon as conveniently may be, appoint time and place for the meeting of the elders and messengers of the churches in said county, in order to their forming themselves into one or more consociations, and notify the time and place to the elders and churches of that county who shall attend at the same, the elders in their persons, and the churches by their messengers, if they see cause to send them. Which elders and messengers so assembled in council, as also any other council hereby allowed of, shall have power to adjourn themselves, as need shall be, for the space of one year, after the beginning or first session of the said council, and no longer. And that minister who was chosen at the last session of any council to be moderator, shall, with the advice and consent of two more elders (or in case of the moderator’s death, any two elders of the same consociation) call another council within the circuit, when they shall judge there is need thereof. And all councils may prescribe rules as occasion may require, and whatever they judge needful within their circuit for the well performing and orderly managing the several acts to be attended by them, or matters that come under their cognizance.

“XI. That if any person or persons orderly complained of to a council, or that are witnesses to such complaints, (having regular notification to appear) shall refuse, or neglect so to do in the place and at the time specified in the warning given, except they or he give some satisfying reason thereof to the said council, they shall be judged guilty of scandalous contempt.

“XII. That the teaching elders of each county shall be one association, (or more if they see cause,) which association or associations shall assemble twice a year at least, at such time and place as they shall appoint, to consult the duties of their office and the common interest of the churches, who shall consider and resolve questions and cases of importance which shall be offered by any among themselves or others; who also shall have power of examining and recommending the candidates of the ministry to the work thereof.

“XIII. That the said associated pastors shall take notice of any among themselves that may be accused of scandal or heresy, unto or cognizable by them, examine the matter carefully, and if they find just occasion shall direct to the calling of the council, where such offenders shall be duly proceeded against.

“XIV. That the associated pastors shall also be consulted by bereaved churches belonging to their association, and recommend to such churches such persons as may be fit to be called and settled in the work of the gospel ministry among them. And if such bereaved churches shall not seasonably call and settle a minister among them, the said associated pastors shall lay the state of such bereaved church before the general assembly of this colony, that they may take order concerning them, as shall be found necessary for their peace and edification.

“XV. That it be recommended as expedient that all the associations in this colony do meet in a general association by their respective delegates, one or more out of each association, once a year, the first meeting to be at Hartford at the general election next ensuing the date hereof, and so annually in all the counties successively, at such time and place, as they the said delegates shall in their annual meetings appoint.”

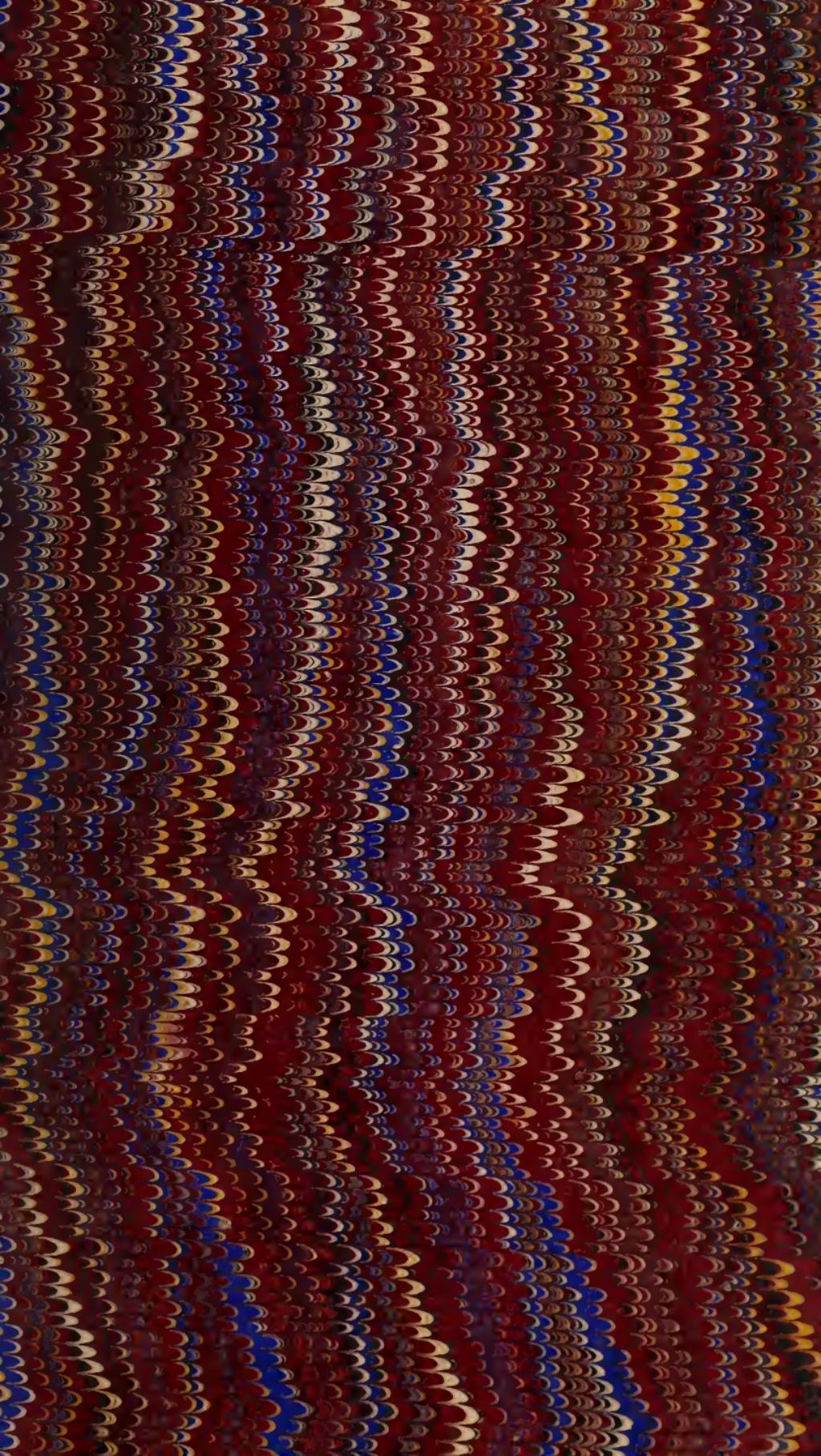
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